BR121
.S45

LIBRARY OF PRINCETON
OCT 16 1916
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Division BR121
Section .S45

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Oxford Reformers, 1867

On International Reform, 1871

The Era of the Protestant Revolution, 1874

The English Village Community, 1883

The Tribal System in Wales, 1895

Tribal Custom in Anglo-Saxon Law, 1902

Customary Acres and their Historical Importance, 1914

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY

LIBRARY OF PRINCETON
OCT 16 1916
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

AN ESSAY ON
THE CHRISTIAN HYPOTHESIS

BY
FREDERIC SEEBOHM

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
FOURTH AVENUE & 30TH STREET, NEW YORK
BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, AND MADRAS
1916

All rights reserved

TO THE READER

THIS book though written more than forty years ago in the middle of the author's life has not been published until now—four years after his death. When in 1876 a few copies were printed "for private use only," no preface was needed, for it passed straight from the author to his friends and through them to others, without in any case losing that personal touch with himself which ensured an understanding of his aim in writing it and also of his reason for refraining at the time from publishing it.

In yielding now to the wish expressed in several quarters for its wider circulation, and to my own desire to add it to the little row of volumes that must represent my father's contribution to the thought and knowledge of his generation, I am most anxious to guard it from misunderstanding. The fact that it was withheld from publication when the subject with which it deals was a burning question of the day is sufficient evidence that the author had no desire for publicity or in any way to enter into religious

controversy. Open-minded himself without reservation and persuaded that the Christian of untroubled faith was the very person who should "be willing to let all the hay and stubble be burned out of his creed," he yet had so great a reverence for the religious aspirations of others, however limited their outlook, and so keen a sense of the pain which many minds experience in the process of readjustment, that he was always reluctant to say or do anything which might seem to force another mind further in any direction than it was ready and willing to go.

Perhaps the appeal of the book is strengthened by the knowledge that it was not written for publication, and that the author had no theological position to defend. As his historical works were the result of the need he felt to search into the past for a clue to the present environment in which he found himself and in which he was living so full and active a life, so this book is the outcome of his need to accord mind and heart by fearlessly subjecting the grounds of his own religious belief and experience to the test of modern scientific thought and method. He was convinced that religion has nothing to fear from honest investigation, and that nothing less than the whole of a man's faculties and mental equipment should be brought to the task of elucidating the problems by which he is surrounded, whether they be physical, intellectual, or spiritual. "I have for long been puzzling my

brain for its own comfort's sake on this great subject," he wrote to a friend in 1867, on the publication of the Duke of Argyll's Reign of Law and of his own Oxford Reformers. "I have worked at the subject, as I say, for my own heart's ease."

This is the book then not of a theologian nor of a student of science, but of a man immersed in the ordinary affairs of life—business, politics, and social work. How keenly he was entering then as always into questions of national importance may be gathered from the fact that he was working (in 1870) in close touch with W. E. Forster over the Education problem and contributing articles on "The Land Question," "The Savings of the People," and various other subjects to the monthly and quarterly reviews; and from his being approached with a view to his undertaking the editorship of the "Economist" on the death of its brilliant editor, Walter Bagehot, in 1877.

His books were the result of long thought and study. He counted it rather an advantage than otherwise that, owing to his scant leisure, it took him some ten years to produce one. In the case of his earlier books the actual writing was done after the main work of the day was over, often in the midst of his family, sometimes with a child on his knee. Together they form an unbroken chain of thought and workmanship which is to some extent incomplete without the present volume. If we are to fit it into its place, we must

in fairness remember that, as regards the author, it is the expression of the current of his thought between the years 1866 and 1876, and was addressed to the mental environment of that time, however much it may also be found applicable to our own. Nevertheless he himself would have been the first to deprecate any personal considerations in judging it. His wish would have been that his reasoning should be fully borne out by the evidence and make its appeal on that ground, should in fact "hold water"—a favourite phrase of his—if it was to make any appeal at all from his mind to the minds of others. Nor must it be imagined that when the book was finished the investigation was closed and the search ended. There was never any thought of finality in the writer's mind with regard to anything he wrote. His books were "Essays," as near the truth of things as thoughtful study and patient investigation could make them, but always stepping-stones for himself and others to further knowledge and understanding.

As the last days of his life (he died in 1912, in his seventy-ninth year) found him still sending his searching gaze down endless vistas into unexplored regions of man's early economic history, following up fresh clues and gathering fresh facts, so also they found him still welcoming fresh light on the long history of human thought and aspiration, pondering on human life, content to recognise in the spirit of Christianity the hope of patient progress for mankind. Without

any attempt to define what he meant by "the spirit of Christianity"—a term he often used and which I have ventured to add to the title-page of this book—it may perhaps be indicated by the following passage which he was wont on rare occasions to read from an old brown leather volume on one of his study shelves—the life of James Naylor, published in 1716—though I cannot give the peculiarly reverent and gentle tone in which he read it, or the eager look with which he sought the sympathetic response of his listener at the close.

"There is a Spirit which I feel, that delights to do no Evil, nor to revenge any Wrong, but delights to endure all things, in hope to enjoy its own in the End: Its hope is to outlive all Wrath and Contention, and to weary out all Exaltation and Cruelty, or whatever is of a Nature contrary to itself. It sees to the End of all Temptations: As it bears no Evil in itself, so it conceives none in Thoughts to any other: If it be betrayed it bears it; for its Ground and Spring is the Mercies and Forgiveness of God. Its Crown is Meekness, its Life is Everlasting Love unfeigned, and takes its Kingdom with Intreaty, and not with Contention, and keeps it by Lowliness of Mind. In God alone it can rejoyce, though none else regard it, or can own its Life. It's conceived in Sorrow, and brought forth without any to pity it; nor doth it murmur at Grief and Oppression. It never rejoyceth, but through Sufferings; for with the World's Joy it

is murthered. I found it alone, being forsaken; I have Fellowship therein, with them who lived in Dens, and desolate Places in the Earth, who through Death obtained this Resurrection and Eternal Holy Life."

H. E. S.

HITCHIN, 1916.

CONTENTS

PART I

THE CONDITIONS OF THE PROBLEM

PAGE

I. Modern Difficulties in the Way of Faith in Christianity 1

II. Necessity of Distinguishing between Christianity and its Changing Mental Environments 10

III. Christianity, so Distinguished, is a Moral Force arising from Faith in the Perfect Moral Character of the Divine Being . 12

IV. Christianity, thus Regarded, seems in Harmony with Modern Scientific Theories of Development and Evolution . . . 18

V. And there is also, at least, some Positive Evidence of Divine Moral Influence on which the Christian Hypothesis rests . 21

VI. Analysis of Moral Influence. The Value of the Evidence of the Moral Emotions . 23

VII. Conclusion as to the Nature of the Evidence upon which Recognition by Man of Divine Moral Influence is Conceivable. The Evidence Mainly to be Sought in the Religious Experience of Mankind . . 27

PART II

SURVEY OF THE MAIN FACTS OF HUMAN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE ANTECEDENT TO CHRIST

PAGE

I. On the Nature of the Evidence for the Facts of Human Religious Experience . 32
II. The Identity of Religious Experience Evidenced by Hebrew Psalms and Christian Hymns extending over 3000 Years 38
III. Greek and Hebrew Religious Experience Compared 43
IV. Greek and Hebrew Polity Compared . 53
V. Jewish Religious Experience to the Time of the Captivity 55
VI. The Messianic Hopes Inspired by the Advent of Cyrus 68
VII. The Messianic Prophecies, and how they were Understood at the Christian Era . 74

PART III

SURVEY OF THE MAIN FACTS OF HUMAN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE—*continued*

Christ and Christianity

I. The Extent to which Christ Shared the Jewish Messianic Expectations and Applied them to Himself . . . 82
II. Christ's Attitude towards Current Views of the Future State 92
III. Christ's Attitude towards the Hebrew Scriptures and the Mosaic Law . . 94
IV. The Attitude of Christ to Miracles . 99
V. The Attitude of Christ towards the Laws of Nature and Physical Evils . . 106
VI. The Moral Basis of Christ's New Law of Truthfulness 108

PAGE

VII. His Freedom from the Great Errors of Future Ages 109

VIII. Christ laid the Foundations of a New Polity—that towards which Modern Civilisation Tends 110

IX. The Recognition of the Extent to which Christ Shared the Mental Environment of His Day is the Recognition of a Fact in Harmony with the Moral Objects of Christianity, and gives a New Sense of Reality to the Life of Christ . . 113

PART IV

SURVEY OF THE MAIN FACTS OF HUMAN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE—*continued*

The Experience of Sixty Generations of Christians

I. The Christianity and Mental Environment of the Apostles 127

II. The Christianity and Mental Environment of Christians 137

III. Christianity seen Working in the Development of Individual Moral Character . 144

IV. Christianity seen Working in the Development of Social and Political Life . . 148

V. The Legitimacy of the Moral Evidence of Christian Experience 153

VI. The Illegitimacy of Sensuous Evidence for the Purpose in Hand 157

PART V

RESULTS OF THE ENQUIRY

I. The Evidence of Religious Experience seems to Support Christianity Itself, but not its Successive Theological Environments . 162

II. Conclusion. The Practical Difficulties in the Way of Christian Faith are not Necessarily Insurmountable . . . 174

THE CHRISTIAN HYPOTHESIS

PART I

THE CONDITIONS OF THE PROBLEM

I

Modern Difficulties in the Way of Faith in Christianity

THERE can be no doubt that the old forms of religious belief, dear to so many, have been rudely shaken of late.

There has not been such a shaking of them since the sixteenth century, and undoubtedly the upheaval of beliefs now is much deeper than it was then.

The Protestant reformers, recognising that the new life of the era came from the Bible, naturally cast the anchor of their religious faith upon it. From a church whose infallibility and Divine inspiration had hopelessly collapsed, they appealed to a Bible which seemed to them to be really divinely inspired and infallible. And it must be admitted that, to a very remarkable extent, they

found it in their day a rock able to bear the strain of their cables.

But how rudely has the rock been shaken since then !

The dying gift of Copernicus to the world gave, perhaps, the first shock to it. The cosmogony of the Bible was found to be at fault. The writers of the Bible placed the Earth in the centre of the universe, as that for the sake of which all the rest exists. But the fact came out that the Earth is but one of the smaller planets revolving round the central sun, and that the solar system of which the Earth is so humble a member is but one of myriads of solar systems, so vast in distance and in number that they form a 'milky way' of stars.

This was a new vision of vastness not vouchsafed to the Prophets, and not told of in the Bible. Under these new circumstances, where were the localities of heaven and hell ? Can they be places at all ? Could the sacrifice of Christ atone for the sins of other worlds ? Was there then salvation some other way ? All this was bewildering. But men's faith in the infallibility of the Bible was too *new* to be very much shaken by it.

There came also to that generation at least one other perplexing question. How about the multitudes of human beings found 1500 years after Christ possessed of an ancient civilisation in the New World ? Were they, too, descendants of Adam ? Had their ancestors not been destroyed by the flood ? For 1500 years had they been left unsaved, because forsooth no sailors from the Old

World happened to have discovered their coasts, and to have borne to them the Cross? This, too, was bewildering. But the theory that they belonged to an inferior race blunted the edge of the difficulty, and so it was allowed to pass.

Then in more recent times came the discoveries of Geology. The Biblical date of the creation was proved to be hopelessly wrong. The 'six days' work' was found to be flatly contradicted by the record of nature herself in the rocks. Men came to realise that the outer crust of the Earth had become fit for animal life by slow degrees and gradual changes, wrought through geological periods of vast duration, and that man himself had at least been in existence upon Earth thousands and probably tens of thousands of years earlier than the date of the Biblical Adam. The discovery of human bones in the deposits of inter glacial periods, and the connection now beginning to be traced between these periods and calculable astronomical conditions, seem likely before long to add almost the force of mathematical demonstration to geological evidence.

Then came the great theory of evolution or development, laying hold little by little on scientific minds, as bearing upon it the stamp of truth, enlisting in its examination more of the child-like spirit of honest enquiry into facts than had perhaps ever before been enlisted, and so developing largely the habit of mind which we call *scientific*.

At the same time, the popular mind led by theologians jumped to the conclusion that,

whether true or not, this theory was contrary to the Bible and religion, and must lead to an atheistic materialism. But far short of such a conclusion, at all events the question remained: Which was true—

1. The record of creation by evolution and unchangeable laws discovered in the diary of nature herself; or,

2. The record of creation by sudden fiat and repeated miracles contained in the Scriptures.

Simultaneously with these discoveries and theories of physical science, the Bible itself became the subject of vigorous and remorseless criticism.

It was found that the evidence for the authorship of many of the books of the New Testament was at least precarious; that it was extremely doubtful, if not impossible, that the Gospel of John could have been written by the Apostle John himself; that the synoptic Gospels, so far from bearing the marks of infallibility, contained contrarient statements; and that Justin Martyr (the only Church-father of the first 100 years after Christ, whose works are undoubtedly genuine, and who at the same time quotes largely facts recorded in the Gospels), while not naming or certainly quoting from any one of the four that have come down to us, quotes at all events sometimes from another Gospel, differing at least in some points from all the canonical four.

And if the records of the New Testament history were thus found to be of doubtful nearness

to the events they record and of doubtful authorship, much more was this found to be true of the Old Testament writings.

The Books of Genesis and Exodus were recognised to be of composite character—to contain portions of ancient tradition or writings dovetailed as it were together and even now so distinct as to be in part separable.

Especially obvious was it that there was an Elohistic narrative and a Jehovistic narrative, and that the latter had apparently been dovetailed into the other by some later compiler. Criticism was divided as to the date of each, but internal evidence seemed to some to point to the age of Samuel as the date of the Elohist, that of David or Solomon as the date of the Jehovist.

But, again, it could not be denied that even if the original story of the Patriarchs and the Exodus could be said to be as ancient as 1000 B.C., there was very strong evidence that large additions had been made by the Deuteronomist on the eve of the Captivity, and by Levitical writers during or after the Captivity.

The Books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings, the Prophets and the Psalms, seemed to have been added to the Sacred Canon immediately after the Captivity ; and, if so, then what guarantee can be given that alterations in the older Books may not have been made in the interval ?

Lastly, some critics asserted, with considerable show of reason, that the Books which appear last in the Hebrew Bible—Esther, Job, Daniel

Nehemiah, and Chronicles—were not added to the Canon till the second century B.C.

These results of Biblical criticism may of course be wrong, and many orthodox divines have laboured hard to prove them to be so. But they also may be right, and he would indeed be a bold Christian who would stake the truth of his religion on the results of a critical contest which, whatever its ultimate result, is not in the least degree likely to end in the re-establishment of the ancient faith that the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is, in the old sense, a divinely inspired and therefore infallible volume.

That these successive shocks coming upon the infallibility of the Bible should also shake men's faith in Christianity itself was inevitable.

Ten generations of Protestants having been taught to rest their faith on the Bible as the Book of Divine Revelation, and the infallible standard of Christian doctrine, it could hardly be otherwise.

But this was not all.

In an age when laws of nature were discovered to show no signs of external interference, but a universal constancy never before realised, it was but natural that men should ask themselves whether documents of doubtful date and authorship could be honestly regarded as sufficient evidence for the strange interruptions of the laws of nature involved in the Scriptural miracles. Many critics denied the possibility of miracles altogether, and many Christians, who felt that

this was an illogical and a too rash assumption, grounded as it was upon *à priori* reasoning, still felt that there was a doubt cast upon the authenticity of the miracles which they did not know how to overcome.

At the very time that increased knowledge of the laws and course of nature made it more difficult to believe in miracles, and the evidence in support of them was undermined by literary criticism, an increasing number of Christians began even to doubt the *moral value* of miracles as accrediting a Divine Revelation, even if they could be proved to have occurred.

And, together with this scientific, literary, and moral discrediting of miracles, there naturally arose a discrediting of the supernatural in all its shapes. As one thing after another which used to be looked upon as subject to interference from another world was explained to be the result of natural causes, and to be ruled by natural laws, it was almost inevitable, that by the very force of iteration the impression should be produced on the mind that *all* things may some day be traced to natural causes : so that there may be perhaps after all no interference whatever with natural laws, whether in the realm of matter, force, or mind. When a tendency of thought sets in strongly in such a direction, faith is apt to lose patience, and doubt is ready to take the leap to denial, if for nothing else, yet for the sake of ending the pain of suspense.

So it has come to pass that, while in the days

of the Reformers, and even so late as the times of Bishop Butler, natural religion and the existence of a Divine Being were taken for granted (as the opening sentences in Bishop Butler's 'Analogy' show), *in these days it is upon the central doubt of the existence of a Divine Being and another life that the unrest of the religious feelings of the age is founded.* The storm which is passing now over the religious beliefs of men is not one which ruffles only the surface, it stirs the deeps of religion and tries the very foundation on which it rests.

Now, whether Christianity will rise above these shocks and hold its own as a living religion in the future in spite of them; and, if so, under what new forms and conditions, is manifestly not a question to be feebly shirked. It is, on the contrary, a question of unsurpassed importance. Upon the result depends in no small degree, not only the happiness of individuals, but also the course taken by the civilisation of the future under the influence of that great democratic wave which certainly has not yet spent itself wholly, but which must either sweep silently on in healthy progress or break in revolution on the 'Rocks Ahead.'

And perhaps to no other nation is it more important that it should be fairly and early met than it is to the English nation. For England has perhaps more to lose than any other nation by the loss of her religious faith. The English

nation is itself more committed than other nations by national and social usages and observances to a public and popular profession of faith. The question is therefore all the more pressing for England, because not only her official but also her national honesty is at stake. The public profession will become immoral when the faith is gone. Unless the Christian faith of the English people can really and truly set itself right with what is real and true, common honesty will require its abandonment. Already, in despair of a better solution of the problem, some of England's best and most heroic-minded men openly avow an honest, though atheistical philosophy, as far more moral than a religion wrapped up in bigotry and subterfuge.

Others dreading this alternative surrender their judgment to Ecclesiastical authority and so seek to save their moral life by intellectual suicide. A dogmatic agnosticism, at the same time, offers a half-way haven of rest to rudderless minds of a less heroic type.

This essay seeks to put in a valid plea in arrest of these hasty judgments. It seeks to enquire whether after all, setting aside *à priori* theological or anti-theological assumptions, and applying inductive methods to moral realities, there be not a *Christian Hypothesis* with higher claims upon human belief, because it has a more real foundation in the facts of human life and history.

II

Necessity of Distinguishing between Christianity and its Changing Mental Environments

Now the more closely examination is made into the nature and causes of the successive shocks which have come one after another upon Christian faith, the more clearly it is believed will these two facts appear, viz. :—

1. That Christianity has unmistakably been mixed up and combined with these premature and now shaken theories of cosmogony, geology, history, &c., to which allusion has been made, and which inevitably formed its mental environments during successive ages.

2. That the successive shocks which have come upon Christian faith as human knowledge has increased have not been as it were blows directly aimed at *Christianity itself*, but have come upon it from the successive changes which have inevitably taken place time after time in its *mental environments*.

No very deep thought is needed to make it clear that a religion having sway over men's hearts and entering into the very centre of their aims and struggles in practical life, could not possibly be held in absolute isolation as in a glass case, screened from everything which might make its flame flicker. This would be absurd. If it be asked, 'Where is Christianity?' the answer is, 'It is like leaven in the lump.' And

in lumps how various! From St. Peter to Pope Pius IX; from Ignatius Loyola to John Woolman; from the Christendom of the Apostles to the Christendom of the Roman Empire and of to-day!

And this being so, the result was inevitable that whenever in each age of crisis and change a part of the mental environment with which Christianity had become for the time united has been dissolved under the action of scientific discovery, Christian faith has been brought with it into the crucible. It could not be otherwise.

But looking back to earlier crises, the fact is remarkable that Christianity has hitherto survived these processes.

Being driven back as it were to its original essence, it has reassured itself of the reality and worth of this, and then all the more boldly entered into fresh combination with the renewed environment; its force showing itself in the new combination, somewhat modified perhaps, but still as powerful for good as ever. Nay, sometimes at least, such a crisis of disintegration in the environment has been followed by a renewed vigour in Christian life!

Such a crisis appears to have again come. If the experience of the past be any guide for the future, Christianity may possibly do the same thing again.

It may perhaps shake itself loose from what yet remains of crumbling environments, old systems of theology and cosmogony, and having

reassured itself once more of its own essential reality and truth, seek to combine itself with the new environment which modern science is so fast constructing for human thought.

Impossible therefore as it may be to examine and test Christianity in absolute isolation and purity—as it were *in vacuo*—nevertheless an attempt to distinguish between Christianity and its manifold environments may probably afford the best key to the problem whether it be possible that Christianity can retain its hold on the highest thought of this scientific age, and, if this be possible, in what way

> Mind and heart according well,
> May make one music as before,
> But vaster.

III

Christianity so Distinguished is a Moral Force arising from Faith in the Perfect Moral Character of the Divine Being

CHRISTIANITY is a religion. But what is meant by a *religion*?

That man has moral instincts was once questioned by the utilitarian philosophers, but is now readily admitted by Mr. Darwin. He regards them as a high development from the domestic or social instincts, which are in degree common to animals of the highest organisation. The dog has

moral instincts. This is seen, not only in what may be called his domestic relations, but also in his relations towards man. His master's thoughts and purposes and plans are doubtless far vaster than he can fathom; yet he can thread his way a few steps into them; he can form some estimate of his master's moral character, so as to discover whether he may be trusted. And being thus in a moral relation to his master, he feels a conscience towards him, and sometimes this conscience arises from fear of his displeasure; but how often, if the moral relation between them should justify the trust, does it not rise into a sense of harmonious feeling and of moral approval?

The domestic instincts of man, even in low stages of civilisation, in like manner produce the domestic tie within the family—the love and fellowship which bind parents and children and the whole family together in one common bond of interest against the outer world. And even in these low stages of civilisation it is clear that the moral instincts produce the phenomenon of conscience. The child has a conscience towards his parents and his brethren. Within the domestic circle there is evinced a sense of duty in its members towards each other.

Then, as civilisation proceeds, the range of the instincts, and therefore of the conscience, widens so as to embrace the tribe, and then the clan, and then, with somewhat weakened force, the nation.

Still, all beyond this circle remains outside

their range: Gentiles, barbarians, Welsh, *not neighbours*. 'Thou shalt love *thy neighbour* as thyself,' is the literal expression of this limited morality.

But, as in the case of the dog so in the case of man, the moral instincts are not only exercised towards his fellows. Whenever man has a sense that there is a moral being or that there are moral beings above him his moral instincts raise a conscience, a sense of moral obligation towards him or them.

Now, the *exercise of the moral instincts towards such higher Being or beings is what is commonly meant by 'religion.'*

It follows from this that religion may be good or bad. For it is evident that when the Deity believed in is supposed to be capricious and immoral, the conscience towards him partakes of the same fitful and immoral character. It may thus be even a sanction to immorality. It is only when the Deity believed in is supposed to be of *perfect moral goodness* that the conscience towards Him can be wholly right and good, and so a sanction to true morality.

Now, the religion even of Christians has often represented the Deity as in some particulars capricious and immoral, and thus often has been and is a sanction to immorality of one kind and another. And hence the absolute necessity of distinguishing between the religion of Christians and the religion of Christ. For it is a matter of plain fact in history that Christ set forth the

character of the Divine Being under the moral aspect of a Divine Fatherhood, and that he set forth the Divine love so effectually in his life and death that his presentation of it has for 1800 years past evoked and does evoke from the moral instincts of true men, to whom it has in any way been brought home as a reality, a love in return which has become the highest power for good that has ever been known in the heart of man. It has over and over again proved itself able so to purify and strengthen the moral instincts as to make them the ruling power in life.

And this, too, is a matter of fact in history, that the Divine Father so set forth by Christ being set forth as the common Father of all *mankind*, the range of the moral instincts of those whose human love has been kindled by it has become widened so as to embrace, as Christ's did, not neighbours only but *the race*.

In other words, the religion of Christ did and does, to those who accept it fully, make religion and morality one. Hence it is that Christianity not only presents to men, in the spirit of its golden rule, a solution of the problem how to attain the highest ideal of individual social and political life, but also gives a moral sanction and motive with the force of an instinct essentially strong enough to produce its attainment. And that in Christianity which has produced the change of heart from selfishness to holiness in individuals, and which has been the highest civilising power in social life is obviously, therefore,

not the changing and often grotesque theologies which have from time to time been intellectually held along with it, but that assurance it has given of the loving Fatherhood of God and the love of Christ to which the practical loving relationship to God and Christ and men has been the direct response. In other words, the source of its power has not lain in any intellectual conceptions of Divine metaphysical mysteries, but in the evidence it has given and in the convictions it has produced with regard to the *moral* character of God. And so also its power has been directly exerted not in inspiring correct intellectual views of metaphysical or scientific truth, but in raising the *moral* instincts of man to a purer standard and a higher life.

That this is indeed so may perhaps be realised by the following very inadequate illustration.

Put religion altogether aside. Suppose the case of a man possessed of ordinary moral instincts but knowing of no religion. He has certain benevolent feelings towards his fellows born of the domestic instincts. He loves his children, his friends, his country. But he has selfish instincts also—love of gain, luxury, or power. These are apt to override his benevolence, to make him mean, sensual, or tyrannical at least towards those whose moral characters or relations to himself are not such as in themselves to evoke his benevolence. But superadd to this man's motives the power of a great friendship with one whose high moral character is beyond question and has evoked an over-

powering affection or loyalty from him. Then in so far as he is conscious that to do this or that mean act for his selfish ends would wrong or wound or forfeit that friendship and degrade him in his friend's eye he becomes possessed of a new motive which overmasters his selfishness. He becomes sustained and strengthened by the uprightness of his friend.

In the same way, superadd to a man's moral instincts, as Christianity claims to do, the conviction of the priceless possession of a divine moral sympathy such as Christ set forth, and there can be no manner of doubt that this addition to a man's moral wealth, so to speak, whereby he becomes a Christian, in so far as it is realised by him, *must* change his heart and enlarge his sympathies and inspire him with a new moral force and motive in life.

Were he, indeed, to suppose himself a special favourite of such a Being, or (which is the same thing) that the moral character of the Divine Being is so low as to make a special favourite of him, of course it might be otherwise.

Then obviously, however much his own conduct might be rightly influenced in some things, the power of such a miserably perverted Christianity as his, instead of widening the range of his moral instincts so as to make them, as Christ's did, extend to the race, would be very likely to expend itself in making him a pattern saint, it may be, in the little sect of his supposed fellow-favourites, while to the outer world his

attitude would perhaps naturally be one of obdurate and loveless spiritual pride.

These considerations seem to make evident in measure wherein lies the secret of the vast power exercised by Christianity during the past 1800 years in spite of all the grotesque perversions to which it has been subjected. They disclose also in measure the reason of its only *partial* successes.

In so far as the originally high conception of its founder of the *perfect moral character of God* has been sustained it has succeeded in its twofold mission, *i.e.* in raising the moral tone both of individual character and of social life.

In so far as this has been distorted and degraded by imperfect or impure human reflection it has failed; and it must have done so as surely as moonlight must fail to produce that awakening of life which sunlight only can produce.

IV

Christianity regarded as a Moral Force seems to be in Harmony with Modern Scientific Theories of Development and Evolution

Does this conclusion that Christianity is not so much a miraculous Divine revelation of supernatural facts and theological dogmas as a *moral force* influencing the moral characters of men by fair and legitimate means, according to the

laws of moral dynamics (if one may so speak), *lessen* or *increase* the sense of its harmonious working with those physical laws of nature and that gradual development or evolution of the physical Kosmos which modern science has revealed ?

Surely the latter.

For the course of evolution in this part at least of the universe is now supposed by scientific men to have been upward through ever-rising stages from—

1. Atoms and molecules under the influence of molecular forces, to
2. Life, with its automatic power to marshal atoms and molecules into organised forms and with powers of reproduction ; and then to
3. Mind, with its consciousness of sensations and conscious power of directing the organism for a purpose ; and, lastly, to
4. Moral sense, with its consciousness of relations to others, and of the obligation to act rightly towards and with them in society.

That is to say, the evolution has been upwards during long ages of gradual development, through vegetable and animal life, to man, with his powers of thought and moral instincts.

And now the course of the moral development of man is perceived to have been historically in like manner gradual through stages upwards towards a higher and higher type of individual

and social life ; the goal or aim seeming to be to produce—

1. The highest individual character.
2. A social state in which men, with their thinking powers and moral instincts, may live together in a true commonwealth.

The intellectual thinking powers of man have been at work aiming at the discovery of the laws of nature, so acquiring power over nature, applying the knowledge so gained to practical purposes, sometimes lessening the toils of life, at other times striving to gild it with the charms of art.

Christianity as the highest religion has worked into this development and become the most powerful factor in the realisation of its highest tendencies. The highest individual character has been produced by it. The highest ideal of a social state is the result of its working. The highest civilisation yet attained is essentially Christian. And it has done this, not by direct intellectual influence, but by the powerful *moral* impetus it has been able to give.

Surely, then, broadly considered, there is here at least the appearance of harmony and continuity, and not of the violent clashing which suggests irreconcilable antagonism.

V

There is also at least some Positive Evidence of Divine Moral Influence on which the Christian Hypothesis rests

It is readily admitted that this general harmony between the working of Christianity in the development of the moral nature of man and the gradual earlier evolution of the physical Kosmos may be in itself of but small value as positive evidence of the truth of the Christian hypothesis. But it at least clears away the very strong *primâ facie* objection which the contrariety between the Christianity of theologians and the facts of nature has done so much to render at least plausible.

To justify belief in Christianity it must undoubtedly be shown that the Christian hypothesis is a legitimate induction from facts, and not a mere *à priori* speculation. Mere consistency with other known facts and laws is not enough to justify belief, unless there be positive evidence on which it can be legitimately grounded.

To this, therefore, attention must be turned.

It is suggested that the positive evidence may be thus stated, as threefold :—

1. There is evidence in modern science of a gradual development of the Kosmos working upwards, as it were, through countless ages, until it has resulted in the production of a race of *moral* beings. This *moral* result legitimately suggests

the hypothesis of a *moral* intention in the development; and, if so, seems to point to the existence of a *moral* being producing it.

2. There is evidence in history that the moral development of this race of moral beings so produced has been working gradually upwards towards a higher and higher moral condition of individual and social life. This continuance of the moral intention in the development of the human race seems to point to the continued agency of a moral being having moral relations to man.
3. The highest factor in the moral development of the human race has historically been the conviction raised in the minds of the highest moral characters of the perfect moral character of that Divine Being whose moral intention and influence they claim to have detected or inferred *from facts in their own religious experience.*

Now, it is evident that the legitimacy of the inference in each of these three cases, scientifically considered (and in such a case as this what is true science is also true common sense), rests upon how far it is within human capacity to detect moral intention and influence, and what sort of weight is to be given to human recognition of it, in nature, in history, or in individual experience of life.

And, therefore, before proceeding further, it becomes important to analyse moral influence and the modes of its recognition, so as to ascertain what is involved in it.

VI

The 'Modus Operandi' of Moral Influence and the Value of the Evidence of the Moral Emotions

It may be best to approach this question by the nearest analogies within reach.

The ear catches a note of music and is thrilled by it. The enjoyment is mental as well as sensuous, but it arises from a mental perception of a material harmony. The vibrations of the air beating upon the drum of the ear are carried by the nerves to the brain and produce an involuntary sensation or emotion of mental delight.

So of beauty of form or colour. Waves of ether beat in upon the visual nerves and produce an involuntary sensation or emotion of mental delight.

Without attempting to enquire what may be the psychological explanation of the fact, it is obvious at once that the mode of perception of the moral beauty of a character or action is only partly analogous.

Whether heard of, seen, or read of in a book, the waves of air or of ether, by which the external evidence of it enters the brain, may even be

harsh and jar upon the nervous system. So that it cannot be any harmony in the *motions of molecules* of air or ether transferred to a physical instrument within the eye or ear or brain, and reproducing upon the molecules of which it is made a corresponding harmony, which produces the result, as in the case of pleasant sounds and sights. But in the case of moral influence the molecular motions seem to be the carriers of a sealed letter which they do not understand. The *mind* unseals it, and reads it. Then, if it contain a *moral* message, thereupon the moral instincts are stirred and thrilled. It is not an uncommon thing for one such thrill to change the whole moral character of a man—to lift him on to a higher moral level for the rest of his life. And in this way one man '*catches*,' as we say, '*the spirit*' of another.

On the other hand, one condition of moral influence is obviously the existence in the person influenced of moral instincts capable of receiving it. A high moral influence is possible only when by development or evolution a being has been already produced with moral instincts so finely strung as to vibrate to and be thrilled and ravished by high moral character when presented to them, just as in the case of the perception of beauty of sound or form organs must have been already developed capable of appreciating the harmony.

But a race of moral beings having been produced endowed, as the human race appears to be, with the precious possession of the moral harp

within, it would seem then to follow as a matter of necessity that the response of the human heart to moral influence is, by law of nature, certain to follow, provided that moral goodness be brought to bear upon it with adequate force. The human heart would seem to be so constituted by law of nature as to be melted into love by the love of another, if only that love be itself of a high enough moral temperature and be brought into close enough contact with it. It seems to be as certain that the human heart will melt at a given moral temperature as that iron will melt if subjected to a certain heat.

The evidence of Christian experience may certainly be cited as proof, so far as it goes, that the very hardest heart can be melted by love, if only a love hot enough can be brought really within its reach.

Now, if this be so, man's recognition or knowledge of the moral character of a person or an act is *as logical, as legitimate, as much based on and tested by experience,* as man's recognition or knowledge of the physical qualities of natural objects.

The difference is not in the logic or philosophy of the influence, for this is the same, but in the kind or nature of the sensation or emotion which the presence of moral qualities in external objects evokes, and which thus is the recipient of the evidence and the bearer of the news.

From certain involuntary emotions produced by molecular vibrations sweeping in upon the

organs of what we call the 'senses,' the mind infers beauty of colour or form in objects external to itself. From certain other and equally involuntary emotions evoked by moral qualities in other persons, or by the mental reading of the moral meaning of certain facts, however brought within its cognisance, the mind infers moral qualities in agents external to itself.

In both cases something external to the mind has stirred up involuntary sensations or emotions, which the mind logically and scientifically takes to be evidence of the existence of that something external to itself producing them.

Man's knowledge, therefore, legitimately embraces facts of which the mind is cognisant through the mental and moral sensations or emotions. And these sensations or emotions make it cognisant of the moral qualities of actions or characters through whatever channel the outside facts regarding them may have been presented to it.

Without at this point going into the question whether in human experience the moral sensations or emotions be more or less treacherous witnesses of external facts to the mind than the physical sensations, if these considerations be true, the question may at least at this point fairly be asked: What becomes of the strange theory of scientific materialists who would have men take it for granted that, whether there be or be not moral agency higher than human at work in the universe, it is, *ex necessitate rei, unknowable to man*, and the

search for it, therefore, a barren enquiry? It surely must be pronounced to be a theory based on metaphysical *à priori* assumptions, and not upon experience.

VII

Conclusion as to the Nature of the Evidence upon which Recognition by Man of Divine Moral Influence is Conceivable

THERE now arises the question whether these considerations throw any light upon the method by which it is conceivable that, consistently with the laws of evolution, a Divine Being might possibly reveal his own moral character to the mind of man, so as to influence his moral instincts, and thereby help onward the moral development of humanity.

Now, the facts seem to be these :—

If the evolution of the physical world be the result of the working of a Divine Moral Being, and if the production of a moral being like man be a result of that working, the time must almost certainly come, sooner or later, when, from observation of the facts of nature the moral design or working in it would become apparent to man, and find its response upon the inner moral chords of the human soul which would thrill in response to it, *i.e.* man would infer the presence of what Bunsen called *God in Nature*.

So also if, in the history of the human race, a moral development, with a real divine moral intention behind it, has in fact been produced and is in course of being produced, there surely also must come a time when some human soul would find his inner moral chords beating in harmony with it, and so detect the presence of what Bunsen called *God in History*.

But it is impossible to deny the fact that these inferences seem to be late and not early realisations of the human mind.

The detection of this seeming moral intention in the gradual development of the Kosmos belongs to the age of science which has discovered the doctrine of development, and not to a patriarchal age, in which evidence of Divine agency in the Kosmos was recognised rather in the earthquakes and lightnings and deluges which terrified and destroyed mankind. Before these terrible aspects of nature were traced to natural laws, and so disarmed as it were of any moral intention whatever, they came upon men as evidence of wrath and cruelty and injustice, so that the very nightmare of the old world was the apparent immorality of the Gods of Nature.

And again, as to the recognition of the Divine moral agency in history,—this, too, as a generalisation from all history is a later conception, which only recent scientific discoveries and theories have made credible to men. For instead of a gradual moral development rising to a higher and higher moral level of human individual and social and

national life (which alone seems harmonious with the gradual evolution of the physical world), the old theory was that of a gradual *degeneracy* from Paradise down to Sodom, from gods and Titans down to heroes and men. And if, in the instance of the Jewish race, there was a faith in the ultimate moral success of the Divine rule in the future, it was after all more like a hope against hope—a theory struggling against appearances—than a simple inference or induction from the facts of human history known to the Jews.

It is possible for a stranger from a mere sight of the position of the pieces on the chessboard even in the absence of the players to detect the probable plot of each with some degree of certainty ; but then to do this he must know the laws of the game.

It would seem, therefore, that as regards these inferences men who live in this age of more advanced science have relatively far stronger evidence, to say the least, than former generations.

But there remains the third line of inference—that from facts in the experience of individual life. And it is upon this that the battle must be fought.

As regards this, too, it might be enough to say that if there be in fact Divine moral action upon the human race it must surely be exerted upon and through individuals, and that if there be Divine moral action upon the lives of individuals, surely the time must come when the highest-minded men thus influenced would recognise it, and so become cognisant of such

Divine moral influence directly upon their own individual characters and lives.

Nor does it seem by any means a fair objection to point to the impossibility of man's being able to explain how such Divine moral influence could be exerted. The very men who may infer from their own experience that they have been so influenced may themselves be wholly unconscious of the *modus operandi*. But it would be altogether illogical, therefore, to deny the possibility of it. Men believed in music long before they understood much about the laws of sound.

But on consideration it will be seen that this is not a case which rests entirely upon the mere impossibility of proving the negative.

To show this it is only needful simply to allude to the existence of classes of facts, some of them connected with religious matters, and others wholly without connection with religion, which seem to point to there being states of mind *in* which, and subtle and mostly dormant powers of mind *by* which, sometimes minds act on one another more directly than by the usual agency of the five senses. Whether these subtle and as yet unexplained media of mental influence be termed 'brain-waves,' 'mesmerism,' or what not, scientific men would not be likely to attribute them to magic. Their *modus operandi* may be unexplained, as that of magnetism or gravitation, but there can be nothing magical about them. And the existence of such facts of mental science not only proves the absurdity of the denial of

the possibility of more direct than ordinary action of mind upon mind but points strongly to the reality of it. And if so then, on the supposition of there being in fact a Divine mind working by evolution in the production of the human mind, it would be a strange presumption to deny the possibility of that Divine mind also influencing the human mind in some undreamed-of way more directly than by its presentment through the ages in the evolution of nature and of human history.

It may, therefore, be quite legitimate for the human mind to infer from adequate evidence the fact of direct Divine moral influence through the mind upon the hearts of men, even though the *modus operandi* of the influence on the *mind* may be wholly unexplained : just as in the recognition of moral intention in the physical development of Nature we are not assuming to know how and by what adjustments of matter and force a moral being has been produced.

Though, therefore, little perhaps may have been gained by this examination of the *modus operandi* of moral influence beyond its having shown the futility of any supposed *à priori* assumption of the impossibility of direct Divine moral influence being exerted upon and recognised by man, it has at least cleared the way somewhat for an unbiassed and unprejudiced survey of those facts of human experience which form the most direct positive evidence on which rests the Christian Hypothesis.

PART II

SURVEY OF THE MAIN FACTS OF HUMAN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE ANTECEDENT TO CHRIST

I

On the Nature of the Evidence for the Facts of Human Religious Experience

THE enquiry now, therefore, must be directed to the facts of human experience from which the inference of direct Divine influence upon the human mind or heart has been drawn, with the view to ascertain how far the inference may or may not be legitimate.

But at the threshold of this enquiry there arises the question whether the evidence for the facts themselves has not been taken from under our feet by the results of modern Biblical criticism.

Hitherto the Bible has been taken by Christians as adequate evidence of a direct Divine influence upon man, because it has been held to be itself a Divinely inspired and infallible record. But if it be after all as human and

fallible as modern historical criticism would have it to be, what, it may be asked, is its evidence worth for the purpose of such an enquiry as this ?

Nor would it do in reply to such a question to be content with taking up a half-way position. It would not do to rest on the results of this or that school of criticism, and, assuming the conclusions of this or that critic to be proved, to proceed to build the foundations of religious faith thereupon.

For suppose, for instance, that, while candidly giving up the inspiration and therefore the infallibility of the books of the Old Testament, the temptation should be to take a firm and final stand on the stories of Abraham and Joseph and Moses as in the main clearly historical and authentic, and to base belief in Divine influence and guidance upon the facts of *their* lives and the fulfilment in after history of the Divine revelations to *them*—where would the security of such a faith be as one by one awkward facts came out from the reading of Accadian tablets or Egyptian inscriptions ? What would happen to it if it were found that others older than Abraham offered their first-born on high places and made 'the sacrifice of righteousness,' while according to Biblical critics the story of Abraham's sacrifice does not occur in the early Jewish Elohistic narrative, written, as critics say, in the time of Samuel, but is found in the Jehovistic narrative written in the days of David or Solomon—1000 years, presumably, after the event ?

And what a shock to such a faith would it not be to find incidents in the life of Joseph recorded also in ancient hieroglyphics of one of the characters in the Egyptian story of 'The Two Brothers,' or that Assyrian tablets record that the Accadian king Sargon was saved in an ark of bulrushes before the birth of Moses!

For who could fail to connect such phenomena with similar phenomena elsewhere occurring—with such facts as that the story of the apple was recorded of the heroes of many a nation before it was told of William Tell; and that, given a national hero, all kinds of stories will cluster round him?

What in such a case would become of the historical basis of the stories on which impatient faith had chosen to take its resolute and final stand?

No; instead of taking up any half-way position, the only wise and honest course must surely be to recognise fully the *real uncertainty* which is naturally and inevitably involved in the stories of great national heroes handed down by tradition, whether in the Bible or out of it.

Nor would such honesty fail of its reward. For it would not follow that such a concession would leave no historical value in the books of the Old and New Testament.

This would be an assumption as rash as irrational. For after all possible criticism the literary remains of early ages, whether in the Bible or out of it, whether legend, poetry, fiction,

or history, are *actual historical strata*, indestructible and trustworthy evidence of what was passing in men's minds and hearts *in the age when, so to speak, they were deposited.* Their evidence of the moral condition of men at the epochs of their deposit is as certain and unassailable in its character as testimony, as that of geological strata is to the geologist, of the physical geography and condition of things in the epochs in which they were deposited.

When Christians realise this, but not till then, they may begin again to feel firm historical ground beneath their feet. If, for instance, the Jehovistic stories of Abraham be not found in the earlier Elohistic narrative, Christians must honestly admit the real doubt that exists how far they are fully historical and represent the real feelings of Abraham 2000 years before Christ. But, having honestly done so, they put themselves on true scientific ground—on ground of fact—when they proceed to regard them as evidence of the thoughts and feelings of the writers or recorders of them in the age when they were written or recorded—perhaps 1000 years after.

But it may be further asked (and with reason): How ought the candid enquirer to treat a *contemporary* narrative, clearly belonging to the strata of a particular age, and claiming in itself to be historical, if it be found to contain records of supernatural occurrences against belief in which the mind of this scientific age protests? Is a

contemporary historical record, or is it not, to be discarded as historically worthless, when it contains miraculous stories ?

The true answer is, that to regard a narrative as necessarily unhistorical because it contains miracles would be absurdly irrational. For it must be obvious on reflection that the most honest historian, if believing in the miraculous, would conceive of and describe many events as miracles, which another historian if a disbeliever in miracles, would describe with not necessarily any more exactness as natural events. One eye-witness of the Spanish Armada might describe as a miracle what to another seemed accident, and they might be equally exact and veracious in their testimony as to what they saw happening to the ships.

When Wordsworth's 'idiot boy' returned from his nocturnal wanderings in the woods the only account he could give of his experience was—

> The cocks did crow 'to whoo,' 'to whoo,'
> And the sun did shine so cold.

Was his evidence untrue or worthless because of the aberrations of his poor muddled brain ? Allowance being made for his peculiar mental environment, anyone can translate his story into terms of reality and be sure that he had heard the owls and felt the chill of the moonlit night.

And so every description of human experience, whether ancient or modern, must be conceived of in terms and reported in language, like the

idiot boy's, consistent with and coloured by the mental environment of the witness or reporter, and almost of necessity it must become even still further distorted by transmission, through perhaps various minds, each adding to the confusion something of his own mental colouring.

These considerations enforce again the necessity of recognising that *every* human being without exception is and must be surrounded by the mental environment of his age and race; and that however much his religious conceptions and beliefs may be raised above those of his time, they must inevitably be modified by and dependent upon those ideas of other matters in which he shares the common belief of his age.

Therefore, in examining the historical strata of human religious thought and feeling deposited by successive generations, it must be specially needful to make full allowance for their actual and various mental environments, and only in so far as this is successfully done will the evidence afford solid ground for inductions of any real value for the purpose in hand.

But the enquirer having thus fully made up his mind to concede unreservedly every legitimate demand of historical criticism, will not fail in his reward. He will find that so far from admission after admission (however reluctantly made) having shaken his faith to its roots and produced historical despair and universal doubt, at once firm rocks of fact appear among the shifting sand. And he will probably have to thank what he may

at first have been tempted to regard as hostile blasts, for having bared these rocks to his view and made them more visible than ever before.

II

The Identity of Religious Experience evidenced by Hebrew Psalms and Christian Hymns extending over Three Thousand Years

Now, on the Christian hypothesis that the moral development of man is the result of a Divine intention, and that the moral power producing it is one with the Power which has produced the physical development in the Kosmos, there is nothing unreasonable in the supposition that historically the recognition of it by men should have occurred in the history of the one leading race most morally developed, and that whatever great forward steps in such recognition may have been made for mankind should have been made through the religious experience of the morally highest individuals of that race. And there need be nothing narrow in the spirit of an enquiry into the facts of the religious experience of this leading race, or of its morally highest minds. For it need not involve any forgetfulness that, as a matter of fact, religious experience has not been confined to the Hebrew nation. Hebrew religious history itself abundantly testifies to this. Nor need we forget for one moment that Christians are not the only people

with a religious experience now. But in an enquiry so brief as this necessarily must be, without ignoring any evidence which may come to hand amongst other races, special attention must obviously be turned to that evidence which is most abundant, and that religious experience which is of the highest type.

At once, therefore, it may be well to turn to that large mass of evidence, of undoubted authenticity and indisputable veracity, contained in the Hebrew psalms and Christian hymns stretching in point of date over a period of at least three thousand years, and proving beyond doubt, that throughout that long stretch of human history there was an identity of general religious experience under a very great variety of circumstances upon the main point on which stress has been here laid, viz. the moral power derived by human hearts from the sense and conviction of the reality of the loving and trustful relation which they have believed to exist between them and a Divine Being of a moral goodness such as to justify that trust.

It has already been said that the moral power of Christianity may be traced to the conviction it has been able to produce in men's minds of that moral goodness, and the human love which in consequence has been evoked in response to it.

Now, the meaning and character of this evidence of Hebrew psalms and Christian hymns is so vividly described in an abridged extract from the pen of Professor Newman (quoted by Dean

Stanley in his beautiful chapter on the Hebrew Psalms, in his 'Lectures on the Jewish Church'), that it may be fairly made use of here :—

'He who begins to realise God's majestic beauty and eternity, and feels in contrast how little and how transitory man is, how dependent and feeble, longs to lean upon God for support. . . . For where rather should the weak lean than on the strong, the creature of a day than on the Eternal, the imperfect than on the centre of perfection? And where else should God dwell than in the human heart?—for if God is in the universe, among things inanimate and without conscience, how much more ought He to dwell with our souls? And our souls, too, seem to be infinite in their cravings: who but He can satisfy them? Thus, a restless instinct agitates the soul, guiding it dimly to feel that it is made for some definite but unknown relation toward God. The sense of emptiness increases to positive uneasiness, until there is an inward yearning, if not shaped in words, yet in substance not alien from that ancient strain—"As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God! my soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God." . . . Then the Soul understands and knows that God is her God, dwelling with her more closely than any creature can: yea, neither stars nor sea nor smiling nature hold God so intimately as the bosom of the Soul. He becomes the Soul of the Soul. All nature is ransacked by the Psalmists

for metaphors to express this single thought: "God is for my soul, and my soul is for God." Father, Brother, Friend, King, Master, Shepherd, Guide, are common titles. God is their tower, their glory, their rock, their shield, their sun, their star, their joy, their portion, their trust, their life. The Psalmist describes his soul as God's only and favourite child, His darling one. So it is that joy bursts out into praise, and all things look brilliant, and hardship seems easy, and duty becomes delight, and contempt is not felt, and every morsel of bread is sweet. The world seems fresh to him with sweetness before untasted. O philosopher, is this all a dream? Thou canst explain it all? Thou knowest it all? But it is not less a fact of human nature—and of some age too—for David thirsted after God and exceedingly rejoiced in Him; and so did Paul, and so have others since.'

The identity of Hebrew and Christian experience alluded to here is strikingly shown by the fact that the Hebrew psalms and hymns of Christians of all ages, and without regard to creed or sect, are used promiscuously side by side in the religious services of Christian Churches and the domestic worship of Christian families to this day.

And the same identity may be further illustrated if this Hebrew and Christian religious experience be tried by the test of moral results.

On the one hand, in both cases, no one would deny that good moral results on conduct—holiness

and purity of individual character—have been the natural results of such a religion as that which breathes through these psalms and hymns, of that trust in the Divine righteousness which they express. Whilst, on the other hand, in both cases it is equally obvious that whatever moral defect there has been in the worshipper's conception of the Divine character reflected itself back upon his own character, and degraded his conduct in this respect however high it may have risen in other respects.

It was quite possible for a Calvinist like Newton, revelling as it were in the sense of the Divine favour to himself as one of the elect, to give expression to his own trust and love in the cabin of a slave-ship, between whose decks a cargo of negro slaves were manacled and suffering all the horrors of their middle passage to slavery in a Christian land! He could not have done so had his conception of the Divine character been morally high enough to prevent him from holding a creed which made it possible for him to believe himself to be more an object of Divine love than they. Such a Christian as John Woolman, on the other hand, who had no Calvinistic element in his creed, testified that in his experience, when he first felt the love of God and Christ in his heart he felt also a new tenderness towards the slave and even the brute creation.

The Psalmists, too, believed that their nation were special objects of Divine favour; and hence

it was that in the same psalms in which they expressed their delight in the righteousness of God they indulged their revengeful feelings and called down Divine curses on their enemies. Had they more fully realised what after all was the faith of the better moments of their highest minds, that their God was the God of the Gentiles also, and that ultimately the knowledge and worship of Him would extend to the Gentiles, and prove to the Gentiles as great a moral blessing as it was to themselves, these verses in their psalms would not, we may suppose, have been sent down to their religious posterity to be quoted by Christian bigots against one another, and to clothe with some outside show of sanctity the selfish hatreds of modern 'saints.'

III

Greek and Hebrew Religious Experience Compared

Not only can this identity of the religious experience of Christian and Jewish worshippers be thus traced to their common faith, limping and imperfect though it might be, in the Divine righteousness, but there is no difficulty in broadly recognising, in the *absence* of faith in the Divine righteousness among other nations, the reason why it was so isolated a phenomenon, and why in earlier ages it was to so great an extent confined to the Jewish people—why, for instance,

so little trace is found of a similar experience among the highly civilised Greeks.

There remains extant a Greek literature contemporary with and extending over a period answering to the period during which the Jewish psalms were written—strata answering to strata—Homer, contemporary perhaps with David; Æschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, Socrates and Plato, roughly speaking contemporary with the later Jewish Psalmists and Prophets. Yet there is little trace of similar experience, because there was not the same consistent faith in the moral goodness of the Divine character. The Greeks had religion enough, but it evoked little love from human hearts to the gods. The Greeks had moral instincts, but their religion weakened perhaps instead of fortifying them. The Greeks had conscience, but their conscience towards their gods often crossed and clashed with their conscience to each other. And this was inevitable, because their conception of the moral character of the gods was such as to evoke fear and suspicion, superstition and hate, but not love.

This is not said to disparage the Greeks and deify the Hebrews, for, as already pointed out, even Jews and Christians have themselves almost always retained something of the same confusions in thought which resulted in the attribution of imperfect moral character to the Divine Being and in the lowering of the human standard of morality, too—witness, again, David's curses of

his enemies and Newton's unconsciousness of the sin of slavery.

Nor is it needful probably to go far for a general and true explanation of this tendency in Christians, in Jews, and in Greeks.

In the 'childhood of the world' nature-worship seems to have been the most prevalent form of religious faith. It was in human nature (visible alike in Vedic hymns and in popular belief to this day) to attribute to the higher powers whatever cannot be referred to human will or well-known natural causes, and whatever seems beyond human control.

And so long as men attributed to the higher powers (as through the modern doctrine of 'special providences' many Christians practically do now, in spite of the warnings of Christ) the injuries inflicted upon good and bad alike by all sorts of natural calamities and accidents and bodily or mental diseases, it was all but inevitable that the higher powers, who were supposed to send these blows right and left upon good and bad in a blind sort of way, should be regarded as revengeful and fickle and unjust, or, should human faith refuse to look such epithets in the face, at least as 'inscrutable.'

So the Greeks judged their gods immoral, and feared instead of loving them. Their conscience towards them was slavish and superstitious. Their better conscience towards each other had to fight for mastery against the false conscience raised by their religion towards their gods.

Sometimes the very point and moral of their epics and their dramas turn upon this conflict ; so that their object seems to be to win over the suffrages of their Greek audience to human morality against Divine injustice.

And hence the untold value of Greek literature as evidence of the gradual moral development of the Greeks—the process by which religion and morality amongst the Greeks were striving after that at-one-ment which the religion and morality of the highest minds amongst the Hebrews had long attained through their clearer conception of the one eternally righteous Divine Being.

The ' Iliad ' may be very bad evidence of the realities of the Trojan War, but it is priceless evidence of the fact that the Greeks of the times of David and Solomon had moral instincts and learned moral lessons from the experience of life.

Achilles may have never lived, but the poetical conception of Achilles is good evidence that the Greeks of the time of David or Solomon, or later, were finding, if they had not found out, that, whether gods were true to one another or not, Greeks ought to be, and that it did not do for men, under the supposed instigation of the gods, to nurse their angry passions and to postpone the public good to the revenge of private wrongs.

The ' Prometheus Bound ' of Æschylus [1] at

[1 The more recent interpretation of the teaching of Æschylus—an interpretation welcomed by the writer of this Essay—although reversing the view stated above, provides still stronger evidence to the argument. To Æschylus Zeus is the All-Father, the Omniscient. Prometheus,

least suggests if it does not prove that the Greeks of the age of the later Hebrew prophets were conscious that there was a higher and more Divine morality in deeds of good-will done by a Titan to the human race than in subservience to an unrighteous Zeus.

The ' Neoptolemus ' of Sophocles bears witness that the dramatist could count on the applause of his countrymen in portraying the struggle and final victory of conscience in the youthful hero over the sophistry of the subtle Odysseus, even though his handing back the arrows might seem counter to the will of the gods, and required a direct interference on their part to prevent its resulting in the failure of the oracle.

The ' Phædra ' of Euripides (in spite of the lying letter put into her hand in death) is surely proof that the Greek contemporary of Malachi dared to recognise that human rectitude could resist and defy the power of immoral gods to break it down.

His ' Alkestis,' too, is surely evidence that Euripides knew well both the depths of human selfishness and the fact that the heart of basest

carried away by his blind love of humanity, has run counter to the will of the Supreme Being and thwarted His high purpose. The play with its lost sequel, *Prometheus Unbound*, was a vindication of the wisdom and righteousness of Zeus and a condemnation of those who oppose his far-sighted and merciful purposes. The endeavour of Æschylus and Sophocles was not to discredit or discard ' an unrighteous Zeus ' but to clear away some of the dross which had accumulated in barbarous ages around the conception of ' the Father of gods and men.'—H. E. S.]

selfishness may be melted and changed by the sacrifice of love.

His 'Heracles furens' is proof that Euripides himself had even risen to the moral point at which, rather than disbelieve in what is good and righteous, he would disbelieve in the gods :—

> I neither fancy gods love lawless beds
> Nor that with chains they bind each other's hands
> Have I judged worthy faith at any time ;
> Nor shall I be persuaded one is born
> His fellow's master ! Since God stands in need,
> If he be really God, of nought at all !
> These are the poets' pitiful conceits !

Mr. Browning has probably caught the true spirit of the scepticism of the great dramatist when he makes the Rhodian sailors cry as they reach their port—

> There are no gods ! no gods !
> Glory to God, who saves Euripides !

Still more in Socrates and Plato is found the same process of righteous scepticism, advanced and developed—a religion of the heart resting on a love of moral good and righteousness, driving out and taking the place of a superstitious dread of immoral deities until there rise glimpses of a conception of one righteous Divine Being, good and the author of good and good only, and hopes of another life where goodness and happiness are for ever one.

There is in Socrates and Plato a faith rising out of and above the confusions of a world in which scepticism of current religion is demanded

by loyalty to moral truth—a loyalty perilous and only to be looked for in the highest minds, because in such an age the true moral teacher must needs expect to be a martyr. 'Let there be a just man in all his nobleness and simplicity, clothed with justice only and with no other covering—the best of men but esteemed the worst . . . this just man will be scourged, racked, bound, will have his eyes burned out; and, at last, after suffering every kind of evil, he will be impaled!' Whether the story of Socrates, as told by Plato, be in all points literally true or not, it is at least a fact that in the writings of Plato there lie passages such as this which seem to anticipate Christianity itself, and which, found where they are, startle us somewhat as we may be startled to find human bones in the same geological deposits as the bones of tropical animals who roamed over the jungles of North Britain in interglacial periods, perhaps 100,000 years ago.

But it is when suddenly turning back from these noble aspirations of the highest minds among the Greeks, the result is compared with the religious experience expressed by the highest minds amongst the Hebrews in the Jewish Psalms during the same and rather earlier periods, that there is apparent a difference as marked at least as the resemblance. For where, indeed, in Greek literature is there anything resembling the steady moral trust in God rising to the point of love and delight which the Hebrew Psalmists

generation after generation expressed in their psalms ?

And the difference is all the more striking and strange when the religious history of the two nations is compared, and an attempt is made to account for it.

For which of the two races, the Semitic, with its gross human sacrifices, or the far purer Aryan, might be expected to have produced the purest conception of the righteous fatherhood of the Deity ?

Surely the Aryan race had the fairest start in this respect, if, as Professor Max Müller gives reason for believing even before the Aryan emigrants left their old home in Asia they had long lifted up their prayers to their '*Father in Heaven.*'

And if the best points in the respective creeds of the two people were borrowed, and not the original inductions of their respective races, what source of higher inspiration had the Jews than the Greeks in their contact with other nations ?

Was it from *Egypt* that Israel had borrowed its light ? They must indeed have been an unimpressible race if 1000 years of contact and neighbourhood with Egypt did no more than set a fashion in Judea for horses and chariots !

But the Greeks, too, borrowed philosophic light from Egypt. Had not Plato himself studied in Egypt ?

Was it from *Persia* ?

The Greeks, too, came into contact with Persia,

and drew inspiration from her purer creed. The rise of that higher religious conception which inspires Greek tragedy is attributed by some to the influence of contact with Persia.

The profound influence of contact with Persia on both Jews and Greeks is undoubtedly remarkable.

It is a remarkable fact, for instance—to which further allusion will be made by and by—that a Jewish prophet should identify the Persian Cyrus, to the Jews a Gentile, as a Divinely sent 'Messiah.' It is perhaps more remarkable still that Xenophon should single out the same Persian Cyrus, to the Greek a barbarian, as the high type of what a true King of Men should be. It is hard to resist the feeling that in the closing words of his 'Cyropœdia' Xenophon is not expressing his own conception (the conception, that is, of a fellow-disciple with Plato of Socrates), after consciously having learned much from Persia, of how a great man should die.

He makes Cyrus thank 'Zeus Patrius, the Sun and all Gods,' for their guidance by signs and omens, having throughout his life been 'sensible of their care and protection.' Cyrus is made to think that his soul will not die with his body, and therefore to beseech his sons to fulfil his wishes from regard to his soul; 'but if it be not so, and the soul dies with the body, yet from fear of the gods, who are eternal, who behold all things, and can do all things, who maintain this order of the universe unimpaired,

undecaying, and without defect,' he implores them neither to do nor undertake on any occasion anything impious or unjust. Next to the gods he bids them '*have respect to the whole race of mankind rising in perpetual succession*' (these are remarkable words), and wills that when he is dead, instead of enshrining his body in gold or silver, they should restore it to the earth, 'as having always borne an affection for men, he would gladly be incorporated with that by which they and all things good are nourished.'

Now, however difficult it may be to realise the reasons of the profound impression produced by contact with Persia on both Greeks and Jews, this ideal description of the death of Cyrus may probably be taken as marking at once the direction and the limit of the development of Greek religious thought under Persian influence. There are in it faint recognitions of the righteousness of the higher powers, of their care, guidance, and protection of men in the course of their lives, of the possibilities of another and a better life for the soul after death, of the unity at least in purpose of the gods; and, lastly, of the unity in interest and blood of the whole human race. They prove, indeed, that the highest Greek minds in these ages, as centuries later, were 'feeling after if haply they might find' what the Hebrew Psalmists and Prophets expressed in their psalms and prophecies.

Both the Greek and Jewish nations have exercised a profound influence upon Christian

development; but however much Christian theology was influenced at different times by Neo-Platonic speculations, without undue disparagement of the Greek or undue exaltation of the Jew, it may undoubtedly be said that the life and power of Christianity came from Galilee, and not from Alexandria.

IV

Greek and Hebrew Polity Compared

No comparison of Greek and Hebrew religions would be complete without a comparison also of Greek and Hebrew polities.

The inherent and inevitable tendency of religion to work itself out, not only in individual but also in social and political life, has before been alluded to.

It is, therefore, perfectly natural that the differences observable between Greek and Hebrew polity should in measure at least correspond to that between their religions.

It cannot be denied that in all that relates to art and the polish of manners and the refinements of life no nation has ever attained so high a level of civilisation as the Greeks. But it was the civilisation of the few and not of the many. Gibbon reminds us that all the subjects of Athens at the height of her power were ruled and taxed for the benefit of 30,000 citizens.

The Republic of Plato was planned so as to lay all the world under tribute in one way or other for the benefit of its citizens alone.

And even as regards Athenian citizens it has been recently well pointed out that when we speak of the refinement and civilisation of the Athenians we shut out of view the trading community of the Piræus—the shopkeepers and merchants and sailors, separated by four miles from Athens itself, and regarded by polished Athenians of the city as an uncivilised rabble. So that civilised Athens was after all but a sort of West End community, an 'upper ten thousand,' small really in numbers, however numerous its dependents, parasites, and slaves.

And even the civilisation of this refined circle permitted the neglect of the aged, placed women in a by no means high position, and left the slave population without the protection of law. Whereas turning again, as before, by sudden contrast to the Hebrew polity, there is found reverence for age, recognition of a sort of brotherhood even with the slave, and in theory at least, along with all the tribal exclusiveness, the attempt to include every Hebrew, and even the stranger within the gate, in some sense as a member of the commonwealth. Nay, even the brute creation seems not left outside the range of its protection.

And what was the reason of this? Does it not lie in the fact that the Hebrew polity was inspired by the Hebrew religion? For notwithstanding

that in the so-called Mosaic legislation there is evidence of defective human justice correlative to defective conceptions of the Divine righteousness, yet there are clear marks of a humanity inspired by religion and working for the purification of the Jewish polity in degree, as Christianity afterwards worked in dissolving the division of classes and inspiring a recognition of the common brotherhood of man.

There surely is no doubt that the great spirit of human freedom, political as well as religious, democratic also, and in its highest sense republican, which marks the modern epoch and moulds the type and aims of modern civilisation, owns its parentage not so much in the maxims of Greek philosophers or the example of the Greek republics as in the Christian sentiment of the common brotherhood of all mankind, which, though taking deepest hold of the young Teutonic nations, with their strong domestic instincts, had itself sprung from the Hebrew conception of the Divine righteousness lifted by Christ above the cramping bond of Jewish exclusiveness.

V

Jewish Religious Experience to the Time of the Captivity

DRIVEN, then, back to consider that the main line of the moral development of the race, so far as it

can be historically traced, is that which is traceable through Hebrew and Christian religious experience, it becomes needful to take a brief survey of the course of this experience, taking, as the main clue to the right understanding of it, the necessity of always carefully distinguishing the growth of the conception of the perfect moral goodness of the Divine character, in which its strength lay, from the successive mental environments by which it was from time to time surrounded.

This, as will be seen more and more fully as the survey proceeds, seems to be the only way to arrive at any fair and clear understanding of the most remarkable fact in human history, viz. the unique position in which the figure of Christ stands between the narrow stream of Hebrew religious history and the worldwide influence of Christianity as the most powerful factor in human moral development. And certainly not till such an understanding is in some measure reached can it be possible for anyone to judge fairly how far in the whole course of the general religious experiences of Jews and Christians, and above all in the unique experience of Christ, there is solid ground for the inference—for the Christian Hypothesis—that a Divine moral power has been at work producing the moral development.

If modern readings of Assyrian and Accadian tablets may be trusted, the evidence seems to be gathering strength day by day that the Hebrews, Phenicians, and other Semitic occupants of Canaan were common inheritors on the one hand of those

traditions as to the Creation, Tower of Babel, Flood, &c., with which we are so familiar, and on the other hand of the religious rites, such as regard for the Sabbath, the sacrifice of rams, and even the burnt-offerings of the first-born of men on high places to the Sun-God, which were not Semitic in their origin, but borrowed by the Semitic races from the pre-Semitic and therefore pre-Abrahamic inhabitants of the district north of the Persian Gulf, in which Ur of the Chaldees was situated.

These early pre-Abrahamic traditions of the Creation, Flood, &c., seem not to have been cast aside by the Hebrews. But as they appear in the Elohistic and Jehovistic records of the period of Samuel and David or Solomon they are repeated, with this remarkable difference, viz. they are purged of their polytheistic character and translated as it were into monotheistic language.

In spite of the protests of the Hebrew prophets the early sun-worship and human sacrifice on high places lingered long as a besetting sin of Israel; just as the eating of horseflesh, connected with sun-worship, continued in England after the conversion of the Saxons to the Christian faith, though forbidden by special Saxon legislation. Its cruel rites were even practised in the Temple itself, along with other idolatries, down to the very eve of the Captivity.

Whence, then, came this Hebrew monotheism and the protest against the prevalent sun-worship and human sacrifice of their fellow-Semites?

All the traditions point back to Abraham, the patriarch of the Hebrew race who had emigrated into Canaan and founded their nation.

The Elohistic narrative records the emigration of Abraham, and describes him as monotheistic, but it gives no record of how he became such; and while mentioning a Divine covenant to give Canaan to his seed, and to make of him a great nation, it makes no mention of any promise that through his seed and his religion all nations of the Earth should be blessed.

These details first appear in the Jehovist (contemporary perhaps with Homer), and at first sight they therefore may seem obviously not likely to be historical, for from what authentic source can they have been drawn one thousand years after Abraham's death?

It is right, however, to say that some details which the Jehovist added to the story of the Flood which the Elohist had omitted are contained in the so-called Chaldean record, on Accadian tablets, and belong therefore undoubtedly to very ancient and probably to pre-Abrahamic and even pre-Semitic traditions, and so the Jehovistic additions to the story of Abraham may also have a very ancient origin, and if so, a more or less historical basis.

Be this as it may (and it must be acknowledged to be at least doubtful), it is still worth while to realise what was the Hebrew conception of Abraham's religious experience and moral character in a period contemporary with Homer, and before Rome was founded.

Translating the Jehovistic story very briefly into modern language and terms of reality, the following points deserve notice.

According to these Hebrew traditions Abraham is the patriarch of the Hebrew nation. His environment is that of the Eastern Sheik, with his large caravan of armed dependents, herdsmen, and cattle. He comes evidently of a race strong in the domestic instincts. He practises monogamy—the great bulwark of the domestic instincts. How nearly he comes to the very type of the Christian gentleman! How dignified and just in his dealings with kings and princes and strangers! How high a moral character he shows in his dealings with his nephew! He has evidently a higher moral standpoint than that of his paternal Chaldean religion and the idolatries around him—than the worship of the Sun-God and human sacrifice to it. And the most striking point of all is that he rises to a higher moral conception of what God *ought to be* than he knows as yet that He is.

The story apparently turns upon this :—

Sharing the mythological and mental environment of the Chaldeans of his native Ur, their deluge-legends and cosmogony, he rises *morally* above it. He shakes off current conceptions of the Deity. He leaves his country to go out alone and to found a race who shall feel after a higher God—an invisible Eternal who he hopes is *righteous*. But he is represented as yearning after rather than knowing of this moral goodness

of the Deity. So his life is a series of experiences from which he learns that the Eternal is of even higher righteousness and truth than he had hoped or thought.

When the Cities of the Plain are destroyed he feels the injustice there would be in the good having to suffer with the wicked. 'Be it far from Thee to slay the righteous with the wicked! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' And so he pleads that the city may be spared for the righteous' sake. It is not till he finds that there are not even ten righteous men in the great city that he feels the justice of the city's doom. And the event proves to him that the Divine justice is higher than even his hopes. Righteous Lot had been spared. Without puzzling over the machinery of this story, what is its moral meaning? It means surely that Abraham, by the fall of the Cities of the Plain, learned a lesson which taught him to raise higher his conception of the Divine righteousness.

So, again, in the story of Abraham's sacrifice. Other men of lower moral standard were sacrificing their sons to the gods they worshipped. He had seen it done over and over again in his native Ur, and it was a religious rite of the Semitic Canaanites and Phenicians around him. Naturally then the trial comes to him whether he is willing to sacrifice his son to his God as men around him are sacrificing their sons to their gods! There is a strange struggle in his heart, till he is willing even to sacrifice his son if so God

should will, but then he becomes conscious somehow that God does not will it ; that the Eternal wants the worship of men's hearts and not bloody sacrifices. Here again, translate the accessories of the story how you will, this is its real meaning. Abraham, according to the tradition, has learned another moral lesson : that the righteousness of God is higher than he had conceived.

And now observe how wonderfully true to the moral truth of things is the story in another point.

We see now how gradual the religious development of the world has been. We see the infinite patience which waited two thousand years before the promise to Abraham was fulfilled, and we see now, after another two thousand years, a third of the human race perhaps believing in the religion which is traceable from Abraham.

But mark what prospect is represented by the Jehovist contemporary of Homer as given to Abraham—how unselfish—not he, but his descendants are to become a great nation and inherit the promised land. In the night a horror comes upon him, and he has a glimpse of the generations of Egyptian bondage which are to intervene. Yet in his seed all nations of the earth will in the far future be blessed.

This, then, is the moral point on which stress must be laid. Whenever this story was written (and even in its present form it is allowed to be older than Rome), however its language may be translated into terms of reality—this moral point is of the very essence of the story—the

most evidently real point about it, the very reason why it was written—viz. this man is represented as having reached so high a moral development through the religious experience of his life that he saw from afar and hailed with gladness the day when through his seed the blessing of the true religion, *i.e.* worship of a God of righteousness, should be extended to all nations. No reward of personal immortality is said to have hovered before his eyes. He is represented as ready to die when his time came and live no more, content to have been found in his day a co-worker with God in the great Divine work of ages, content that those who come after him even down to a remote posterity should, through generations of darkness, hand the torch of the true religion on till in the fulness of time it should lighten the nations.

Well might Christ, looking back upon Abraham, say, 'Abraham saw my day and was glad.' For here was a man, living 2000 years B.C., or pictured by tradition 1000 B.C. as so living, sharing the mental environment of the Eastern Sheik, but represented as rising in moral perceptions into harmony with what four thousand or three thousand years more of human history was to prove to be the spirit, so to speak, of the laws of moral development—getting on to the true lines on which the moral progress of the race was destined and is yet destined to move!

Pass from Abraham to Moses. He it is who,

according to the same Jehovistic tradition of the age of Homer, founds the polity of the Jewish religion and nation. How the story in his case also extrudes the possibility of any selfish object in Moses! When in the heat of young enthusiastic patriotism he wills to deliver Israel he cannot. His passion prevents him. When after forty years' retirement in the wilderness his ambition has died out of him the mission to deliver Israel is forced upon him, and he too, like Abraham, becomes the very type and pattern of the unselfish co-worker with God for the good of his fellows. And how his conception of the Divine character according to the story grows by experience like Abraham's!

Look at this one picture. Israel has been delivered. They have believed in the invisible God as their deliverer out of Egypt. Moses has been some days on the mountain. He comes down to find them worshipping the Golden Calf, forsaking God and making for themselves visible gods like those in Egypt. Mark the nature of the anger of Moses. It is the anger of the unselfish Saviour. The children of Abraham have after all rejected the God of their fathers; even Aaron has! Moses alone remains true to God. Through him and his seed alone can the promise now be fulfilled. That is the natural inference. God will cast them off now, he thinks, he and his seed will be substituted for them, that the promise to Abraham may be fulfilled. This is his conception of the position. A man with a

spark of selfishness would have closed in with the position readily. But not so Moses. He grinds the idol to powder and makes the people drink of it, and then goes back into the mountain. There he, like Abraham, pleads with God to be more gracious than he dares to hope He may be. He imputes his own righteous wrath to God, and tries to remove it. He pleads, 'Oh, this people have sinned a great sin and have made them gods of gold! Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book!' Then follows the wonderful story of how Moses himself, feeling the need of his own faith in God being strengthened if he is to lead this rebellious people further on their way, asks for himself a nearer knowledge of God! 'Shew me thy way that I may know thee!'—a request so natural even to ask to see an Invisible hand! so illogical yet so true to human nature;—if we could but see the Holy Grail! And the reply, 'My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.' And he said, 'I beseech thee shew me thy glory.' And again, the reply that Moses *could not see his face but should see his goodness*, and then Moses in the cleft of the rock, like Elijah, recognises in the wild powers of nature only the outer garments of Deity, while he accepts as a true glimpse of the Eternal the still small voice which thrills upon his moral ear. 'The Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands,

forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and yet that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children unto the third and fourth generation.'

Ewald acknowledges this passage to be undoubtedly ancient, and we may well wonder whence came this conception of the merciful long-suffering graciousness of the Power which works in human history, held along with the evident fact that the forgiveness of sin does not contravene the law of nature whereby the moral like other qualities of men, sins and their consequences, are transmitted from generation to generation.

And, turning from Moses to his laws, they too are found partaking of the nature of the environment of the age—a tabernacle after the model of an Egyptian temple, with its altars, its sacrifices, and its priesthood, its elaborate ritual and minute rules of life; but in *moral* elevation the worship rises above its environment; there is all but the idol, there is the throne, the mercy-seat, the cherubims of glory above the mercy-seat, but there is no idol; a vacant space is left for the invisible deity.

And so of the sacrifices everything is done to make them symbolic of the real sacrifice of men's hearts and lives which is the only true worship, and above all there is the pure morality of the Decalogue, whatever its precise date may be, of which Christ could say that it was embraced

in these two commandments, ' To love God with all thy heart and thy neighbour as thyself.'

Finally, observe the identity of tone in the moral character of Moses and Abraham. Moses like Abraham is represented as a man looking for nothing for himself, knowing apparently of no life after death, in which reward might come for the toils of a noble life, but wholly devoted to working with God in that same great gradual patient work of the moral development of his people in the prospect of which Abraham had rejoiced afar off.

So in the same way Elijah might be taken as the type of the true prophet. Surely in his case also there is the same entire absence of any selfish object—jealousy for the character of God, because His altars were destroyed, and ' I only am left. What am I better than my fathers ? ' He had rather die than live to see the work of God in the world frustrated and left to go wrong. When another man came in the same self-abandonment, content simply ' to prepare the way ' for one whose shoe-latchet he felt himself unworthy to stoop down and unloose, he was said with truth ' to come in the spirit and power of Elijah.'

Nor were moral characters such as these without historical reality—the mere dreams of religious romance writers—for coming down to clearly historic times, contemporary with the Captivity, two figures at least rise into prominence, and have left clear records of their religious life behind them—Jeremiah in

Jerusalem, Ezekiel in captivity, the one from afar, the other on the spot, witnessing the great events which brought desolation upon the sacred city, and pouring out their lamentations over her ruin.

These are historical characters at all events, and they have left behind them evidence enough of what were their religious feelings and aspirations, and they are of the same type and spirit as those of the more ancient heroes and saviours of the nation. While their own fortunes are broken and crushed with that of their country, they sink their own selfish grief in the national sorrow. They bear the grief and carry the sorrow of their people. Because of their people's sin they are smitten and afflicted. Nevertheless their own people spurn them! And what is it which inspires their never-dying hopes in the midst of lamentation and despair? It is not mere patriotism. It is not the martyr's submission to the cross in anticipation of the crown hereafter. It is their intense absorbing faith in the Divine righteousness, their sense and certain hope that, whatever may become of Israel amid the wreck of nations, the kingdom of everlasting righteousness will yet rise and be established in triumph upon earth, and they care more for this than for their own or their country's glory.

Even if this Hebrew religious history ended at the Captivity, the simple fact would be that Jewish religious experience from the earliest

times up to the time of the Captivity did produce men who were able thus to identify their own selves with the great work of the Divine righteousness. But it did not end here. It is also a fact that these men thus pouring out their soul unto death, and bearing the burden of the sins of the people, did divide the spoil with the strong, inasmuch as they were able by their own faith, fulness to keep alive in human hearts that faith which, rising above the wreck of the nations of the old world, has conquered and is conquering still. The faith which they kept alive from hand to hand through these dark times became a factor in the work of human moral development more powerful to alter the course of human history than the influence of mighty conquerors and kings.

VI

The Messianic Hopes Inspired by the Advent of Cyrus

In passing from the older heroes of the Hebrew nation to the Messianic prophets the question again forces itself into notice, how far the new ideas which appear in Messianic expectation or prophecy may have been derived from Persian influence. Allusion has already been made to the profound influence of the contact with Persia upon both Hebrew and Greek religious thought, and to the remarkable fact that both the later

Isaiah and Xenophon held up Cyrus as a sort of Messiah—as the type of a righteous king.

Obviously, therefore, it would be of great importance to this enquiry if some real light could be thrown upon the nature of that influence under which the Hebrew prophets of the Captivity passed when their Babylonian masters were themselves conquered by the Persian conquerors.

Clearly there must have been potent reasons why this advent of Cyrus was such an epoch—such a watershed in history. And the main reasons, at all events, are not difficult of recognition.

For (1) it marked the final fall and end of the great Semitic empires of ancient history, which had hitherto led the advanced guard of human progress, and with whose traditions, tendencies, and destinies the Hebrew nation (being one of them) had been so intimately mingled. Not Jerusalem alone, but Tyre, Egypt, Babylon, all now fell never to rise again in their old power and glory. And with this Persian Cyrus there came upon the stage of human history the first in succession of Aryan empires,—Persian, Greek, Roman, Teutonic,—which in their turn were to absorb the interests of history and lead the onward march of civilisation.

And (2) with the rise of the Persian power a new religion (it would seem, however obscurely) was to contribute its quota to the religious and moral development of the nations.

The Hebrew people, who had never been able, notwithstanding the warnings of their prophets,

to rise above the debasing influences of the besetting sins of their Semitic race—idolatry, unchastity, and deceit—and who found themselves now in captivity in the very nursery of these Semitic sins, because their moral slavery to them had left them without power or spirit to resist physical conquest, found themselves, now that their conquerors were conquered by Cyrus, face to face with a religion which, instead of tempting them into these besetting sins, was utterly opposed to them. The Persians hated idolatry, and were, indeed, eager iconoclasts wherever their conquests carried them. And although their religion was not absolutely monotheistic, like the Hebrew, it was what was far more important, like their own highest religious aspirations, in this : viz. that it imputed to the Deity who was supremely worshipped *moral goodness* of so high a character as to make *purity* and *truth* the prominent qualities called for in the worshipper. It was a religion, too, which regarded the earth as the bountiful and beneficent parent of *all mankind*, and consequently recognised, in some sense, the universal brotherhood of men. It held up more clearly at least than Greek or Hebrew faith had hitherto done a prospect of rewards and punishments in a life after death on the one hand, and on the other hand Messianic hopes of a universal rule of justice and righteousness upon earth.

Further light may some day be thrown upon these remarkable characteristics of the early

Persian faith. But enough is known already to suggest the reason of the profound influence received by Hebrews and Greeks alike from their contact with Persia.

Enough is known to suggest at least strongly that the order of moral development observed amongst the Hebrews had had its parallel in Persian history. Out of the confusion of Semitic traditions and practices to which Accadian tablets bear witness, Abraham, it seems, had been able to rise into a higher moral conception of a God of Righteousness. Out of the confusion of Aryan traditions, to which the Vedic literature bears witness, Zoroaster had, it seems, also been able to rise into the high moral conceptions of a God of purity and truth. And in each case doubtless the high moral conception of the Divine character (amid whatever confusion) had given the remarkable power to influence for good the moral development of mankind.

There were also special reasons why the Hebrews should have been profoundly influenced.

Not only would it seem that the order of moral development in the moral descendants of Abraham and Zoroaster had followed somewhat similar lines, so establishing a sort of moral affinity between them, but at this particular juncture, when they were brought thus into contact, it should not be forgotten that the religious experience of the Hebrew prophets had predisposed them in a remarkable degree to learn such moral lessons as the Persian religion could teach them.

For their own captivity, the ruin of their nation, the break-down of the Mosaic system, the destruction of their temple, the cessation of the sacrifices, the uselessness henceforth of the sacred sacerdotal order (so that the priest and prophet Ezekiel cut off his hitherto unshorn locks and cast them on the ground, as a sign that his priestly office was no more!), the universal apostasy of their nation, and the scorn heaped by the Jews themselves upon the 'remnant' of faithful men among them who witnessed and prophesied as it seemed in vain hoping against hope—all this had intensified their individual faith, their solitary isolated trust, and made it independent of time, place, and race, as well as of priesthood, temple, and ritual. All this made it possible for them to recognise in the Persian religion something closely allied in spirit to their own. It enlarged the boundaries of their religious sympathies. They themselves had found it possible to serve God by the rivers of Babylon as well as in the courts of the Temple in the sacred city. They now found it also possible to recognise in a Persian sovereign a fellow-servant of the Eternal. They seem even to have been able to adopt from Persian sources ideas of a future life more definite than their own, and to look for the hastening if not the final triumph of the Divine reign of righteousness upon earth through the conquests and rule of the Persian conqueror.

How else can be explained the cheerful tones of the 'Later Isaiah'—those bursts of Messianic

prediction coupled with the very name of Cyrus, and overleaping Hebrew boundaries, till the vision embraces the whole horizon of the world, and at the same time rising to a moral tone which has earned for the writer the epithet of the Evangelical Prophet?

If, indeed, taking the next 400 years of Hebrew history, it be asked whether his moral hopes and those of his successors in Messianic prophecy were realised, the reply must be honestly No! But if, taking the whole 2400 years of human history which have since elapsed, the same question be asked, the answer must be Yes! albeit on a far different scale and in a far different way from that of their expectations.

For the fact remains indestructible that, whatever may be the real measure in which their faith was influenced by the contact with Persia, it has been by the union of Hebrew and Aryan influence that the work of human moral development has been and is still being done.

The Hebrew Messianic prophets were right in their leading religious instinct. It *was* through faith in the Divine righteousness (of which they were the suffering dispersed and rejected remnant of witnesses) that the moral development of the race was to be wrought. And Cyrus was a fellow-servant with themselves in this great work of bringing this about. Their cry in the wilderness was not an empty one. It was by it that the witness was handed on. The solitary torch borne by them did keep the embers alight which were after-

wards kindled in flame. The fact remains that they, like Abraham and Moses, were on the true lines on which the moral development of the race was to proceed, and it was their individual faith in the Divine righteousness resting on the rock of a religious experience which survived all storms, that placed them in this remarkable position, as links in the eternal chain of moral evolution.

VII

The Messianic Prophecies and how They were Understood at the Christian Era

LITTLE more need have been said here respecting the Messianic prophets were it not that some of their predictions have an accidental importance, wholly apart from their intrinsic interest, inasmuch as they afford the only clue to the solution of one of the most puzzling problems which religious faith has to encounter when it comes to examine the course of things at the Christian Era. And, therefore, a closer examination of them is absolutely necessary to make the latter intelligible.

All that can be done here, however, is very briefly to sketch the line of thought which it might be most useful to follow in a more detailed examination of these Messianic predictions.

And first the enquirer might do well to begin by opening his eyes fully and honestly to the fact

that prediction was not confined by any means to the Jews. Every nation had its oracles and auguries, fortune-tellers and prophets. Machiavelli, writing in Florence in the early years of the eventful sixteenth century, makes this observation on a prediction recorded by Livy in his Roman History, viz. that hardly any great event has ever happened without being foretold by some one, and he goes on to cite the instance known to himself of Savonarola having predicted the coming of the French armies and their ravages in Italy. He might have gone on to say (had he known that this prophecy also would be fulfilled) that Savonarola predicted the coming of the Reformation, and died before it came. If there be, therefore, what is popularly called prediction in the prophecies of the Hebrew prophets, there is nothing unique in such a fact. Nor is the main value of these Hebrew prophecies to be looked for in the exactness of their literal fulfilment. It would, indeed, be but a small and trivial thing to say (if it could honestly be said) that in the closing years of the Jewish Monarchy prophets arose claiming a map-like knowledge of future events, and able to foretell them and their dates in oracular responses veiled in dubious imagery and in mystic numbers.

The small practical worth of this kind of prediction for any moral purpose must surely have been long ago learned from the experience of those who have so often made shipwreck on the rocks of millenarian calculation.

Would not any one of our modern millenarians exult beyond bounds if he could make out in connection with the mystic numbers of Daniel or St. John the Divine a chain of coincidences so complete as that which is contained in the letter given below ![1]

[1] The following letter went the round of the newspapers in 1870 :—

'The following extraordinary combinations of figures appeared in a Brighton paper last year (1869). They were cut out at the time and kept. Now they are worthy of a reprint, and are at your service :—

Louis Philippe.		Napoleon.	
King of the French .	1830	Emperor of the French	1853
Born 1773 .	1 7 7 3	Born 1808 .	1 8 0 8
	1848		1870
	1830		1853
His Queen born 1782	1 7 8 2	The Empress born 1826	1 8 2 6
	1848		1870
	1830		1853
They were married 1809	1 8 0 9	They were married 1853	1 8 5 3
	1848		1870
Louis Philippe abdicated . .	1848 !	Napoleon III. surrendered at Sedan . .	1870 !

[1] The prediction which follows was copied many years ago

Who, then, would willingly suffer himself to be drawn by ingenious and subtle theologians into resting his faith in the truth of Christianity upon any such precarious foothold as this of the correspondence of prophetic figures with facts?

Seeking, then, for the true character of these predictions, there can be no doubt that they were of very various dates and had reference to very various circumstances; and most instructive would it be, if it were possible, to clothe each prophet once more in flesh and blood, and to read in his words the full, clear, vivid meaning they conveyed to men to whom they were addressed.

Some would have vivid reference to events which preceded the Captivity—the national apostasy, the coming of Egyptian, Assyrian, and Babylonian armies, as a scourge for the nations' sins, the danger of the Jewish capital, the rapid turns of events which ended in its destruction. Then would come lamentations upon the desolation of the Sacred City. Others would be recognised as cries of reviving hope from the faithful remnant of captive Jews by the rivers of Babylon welcoming in the conquests even of the Gentile

from an old volume of predictions, said to have been written in the fifteenth century. It is also at your service :—

In twice 200 years the Bear
The Crescent will assail;
But if the Cock and Bull unite,
The Bear will not prevail.
In twice ten years again [1856+20=1876]
Let Islam know and fear;
The Cross shall stand,
The Crescent wane, dissolve, and disappear.'

Cyrus, not only the dawn of a new era for the Jews but also of a new kingdom of God upon earth. And lastly there would be the apocalyptic prophecies of the Book of Daniel, written after the Return, and of much later date, but of what date is of little moment here.

The fact which is of moment is this : that as from time to time the Messianic expectations of the Jews remained as yet unfulfilled, they were again and again cast forward into the future, and they became clothed in the language of older and later prophets without distinction of dates, circumstances, and original meaning—all their real historical setting equally forgotten or disregarded—until as the sacred canon was closed and generations passed, ' The prophets ' were quoted, as the Bible is by many pious people now, as though it were a single book of inspiration, containing divine predictions still to be literally fulfilled in those latter days in which each successive generation is so apt to conclude that it is living.

So it came to pass that at the Christian Era the expectations of 'the great day of the Lord' and the advent of the Messiah were clothed in the old prophetic language of all periods and of all prophets jumbled together.

Passages in the Deuteronomist which had had their application already in the fall and dispersion of Israel and Judah, and in at least two destructions of Jerusalem before the destruction by Titus, were still held to be prophetic of the future. Prophecies of Joel and Zechariah were so treated

regardless of whether they were uttered and had had their application before or after the first destruction of Jerusalem.

Fragments from these older prophecies, or perhaps it would be more correct to say fragments of prophetic imagery from them, were blended with the much later visions of Daniel, of Messiah cut off, the city and sanctuary destroyed, the ceasing of the sacrifice and oblation, the abomination of desolation (all of which had had a sort of fulfilment in the destruction of the city in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes), followed by the final triumph of the kingdom of God (which, alas! was yet future), in which in the prophet's vision 'the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and there was given him dominion and glory and a kingdom that all nations should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away.'

Nor would it be wise to forget that the course which Jewish expectation had taken, looking forward to the actual foundation of a Kingdom of God upon earth in the person of the Messiah apparently led to another singular result.

While Socrates and Plato were seeking by philosophical arguments to find rational grounds for hopes of a personal immortality, the pious Jew had to a great extent merged his personal hopes in the national triumph of the Messianic reign upon earth. If Enoch was regarded as translated, and perhaps Moses also, to heaven, and if Job reasoned from God's justice that he should stand

upon the earth at the latter day and see the Messiah in the flesh, and if Daniel was to stand in his lot at the end of the days, and if the Maccabean children had reasoned that the just God would raise up his martyrs to a new life, the most that can be said of these instances is, that faith in the moral goodness of God had inspired a faith in another life, and that as exceptional characters they claimed exceptional treatment from God. But it should never be forgotten that the hopes of even these had taken the shape of a resurrection at the advent of the Messianic reign upon earth, that they might see with their own eyes the final triumph of righteousness.

After the Captivity there can be no doubt that belief in a Hades became more general and defined than it had been before, owing probably, as has been said, to Persian influence. And that Persian influence in such matters should have been so sustained and permanent is not unnatural, when it is remembered that it did not end with the decree of Cyrus. The most important branch of the Jewish Church and the highest Rabbinical authority remained at Babylon and were at Babylon at the time of the Christian Era.

Nor should it be forgotten that the Jewish Church had passed successively not only under Persian, but also under Greek and Roman influence, and that in classical as well as in Egyptian mythology a belief in Hades held a prominent place.

And the singular result was that, *not by any*

pretence of fresh Divine revelation embodied in any canonical book, but rather in that oral tradition which in so many things 'made of none effect' the law of Moses, belief in a life after death had crept into Jewish expectations. The Pharisees, following foreign traditions, taught that in Hades (that land of forgetfulness, in which the Psalmist saw neither 'thought nor device') there was a Paradise in Abraham's bosom for the blessed separated by a gulf from the place where the cursed were tormented in flames. And here the dead were pictured as kept, not, be it noted, *for ever,* but *till* 'the great day' when the righteous would rise to share the Messianic reign, to enter the Kingdom of which Jerusalem was to be the seat, while the evil would be cast away into outer darkness; the Gehenna or valley of Hinnom, outside the closed gates of the City of God, where there should be weeping and gnashing of teeth, and where inextinguishable fires should utterly consume the offal.

The Sadducees, on the other hand, rejected these notions as not to be found in the law of Moses, and believed, we are told, in neither Angel nor Spirit.

Such seem to be some of the marked features of the mental environment of the Jewish mind, at the dawn of the Christian Era on the subject of the Messianic reign upon earth, and the hopes of a bodily resurrection of the saints to its enjoyment.

PART III

SURVEY OF THE MAIN FACTS OF HUMAN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Continued

CHRIST AND CHRISTIANITY

I

The Extent to which Christ Shared the Jewish Messianic Expectations and Applied them to Himself

Now, if the moral order of development in the Jewish mind preparatory to the Christian Era was anything like what has been most imperfectly described, then at the very outset of the attempt to realise in any measure the history, position, and mind of Christ it will be evident how intimately connected his own character and mission were with what had preceded them, and how completely he is described by the synoptic Gospels as sharing the mental environment of the Jew of his age in regard to the national Messianic expectations.

That he preached that the ' Kingdom of God,' of which Daniel had prophesied, was at hand,

there can be no doubt. That he felt himself to be the Son of Man spoken of by Daniel is equally clear. That he had studied these Messianic prophecies is proved by the number of times he quoted them and applied them to himself, and more than anything else by the fact that so much (if not *all*) of what he said of the future was clothed in their language.

The following passages seem to place beyond a doubt the fact that, according to the synoptic Gospels, Christ not only applied the Messianic prophecies to himself, but, as it would seem, on their authority, expected and led his disciples to expect his second advent as the Son of Man in the clouds and the final establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth within the lifetime of men then living.

MATT. X. 23: Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of man be come.

MATT. XVI. 27, 28.	MARK VIII. 38 and IX, 1.	LUKE IX. 26, 27.
For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he reward, &c.	Of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.	Of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.
Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.	Verily I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power.	But I tell you of a truth, There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Kingdom of God.

Matt. XXIV.	Mark XIII.	Luke XXI.
And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.	And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds, with great power and glory.	And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

And then after saying that as 'when the tender leaves of the fig-tree appear ye know that summer is nigh' the discourse proceeds :—

So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near even at the doors.	So ye in like manner when ye shall see these things come to pass know that it is nigh even at the doors.	So likewise ye, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand.
Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass till these things be fulfilled.	Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass till all these things be done.	Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled.

Matt. XXV.

When the Son of man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory and before him shall be gathered all nations. . . . Then shall he say to the sheep, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Matt. XXVI.	Mark XIV.
Henceforth I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom.	I will no more drink of the vine until that day that I drink it new in the Kingdom of God.
. . . . .	. . . . .

MATT. XXVI.

Tell us whether thou be the *Christ* the Son of God.

Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of Power and coming in the clouds of heaven.

LUKE XXIII.

Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, this day shalt thou see me in Paradise.

MARK. XIV.

Art thou *Christ* the Son of the Blessed?

And Jesus said, I am, and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of Power and coming in the clouds of heaven.

ACTS I.

While they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

. . . . .

This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

How fully these often repeated predictions found an echo in the expectation of the disciples may be traced in St. Paul's Epistles, in which such expressions as 'the day of the Lord,' 'that day,' 'we that are alive shall meet Him in the air,' &c., show how constantly the prospect of a speedy advent from the clouds dwelt upon his thoughts.

So, too, in the Apocalypse mark the iteration of these words, written, it would seem, about A.D. 96, *i.e.* after the persecutions had been going on for years, and *after the destruction of Jerusalem:*

Behold he cometh with clouds even so. Amen!
Behold I come quickly!
The time is at hand!
Behold I come quickly!
Surely I come quickly! Amen.
Even so, come Lord Jesus!

And this seems to be the last word of hope and expectation of the beloved disciple—of him of whom it was said, 'If I will that he tarry till I come what is that to thee?'

The last of those 'standing here' saw death, the generation passed away, and yet they did not see the Son of Man coming in the clouds.

The Messianic dream of a second advent in triumph on Earth was unfulfilled, and so it has remained.

Let it be considered for a moment how natural then (however unnatural and impossible now) was the prospect of the second advent in the clouds. It is well that we should recognise that it was in perfect coincidence with the received cosmogony of the times, and so was the natural realistic clothing of what after all was in its essence a moral expectation.

To Plato (and probably to the Jew) the inhabited portion of the earth was but a valley or hollow washed by the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf, surrounded by vast unknown regions of land and ocean. As the surface of the sea washed on the shores of lands inhabited by men, so the surface of the blue air was supposed by Plato to wash the shores of far distant

and loftier regions of the earth, rising like islands out of the air close under the heavens, and there, in that upper region of light and glory, were supposed to be the 'many mansions' of the blest. Even Hebrew Psalmists had placed the abode of the Deity there, and made the clouds his chariot and the lightnings his arrows.

If, therefore, the Messiah was to come down from the right hand of the throne of God it would naturally be in the clouds of Heaven. If his coming was to be realised at all, the external form in which it was conceived must needs be thus moulded by the cosmogony of the age.

It must not be lost sight of, however, that it is perhaps possible that the synoptic Gospels may exaggerate the extent to which Christ adopted literally the Messianic predictions of the prophets.

The passages above quoted relating to his second coming in the clouds, and so soon, are almost all quotations from those prophets put by the synoptic Gospels into the mouth of Christ, as though *re-uttered* by him.

Now, we have mentioned a possibly older Gospel, apparently quoted sometimes by Justin Martyr. That Christian Apologist in his argument rests very much stress upon the fulfilment of prophecy. He quotes the Messianic predictions of the prophets, and shows that they predicted an advent of a suffering crucified Messiah, and also a second advent in glory in the clouds of heaven, which he declared that Christians still

looked forward to in his times. He quotes the prophecy of Christ that his followers should be persecuted and imprisoned, and so he says they are. Now, if the older Gospel from which he quoted had mentioned that *Christ* prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and his second advent, it would have surely made his argument doubly strong. He would surely have said, 'Christ predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, and it came. He predicted his own coming in the clouds, and he will doubtless come.' But he does not do so. None of the passages which we have given above are mentioned or quoted by him. It therefore is perhaps possible that the passages were not in his older Gospel, and so they may possibly not be genuine.

But on the other hand there is the strong evidence of the expectation of the disciples which corroborates the concurrent evidence of the synoptic Gospels. And there are two considerations which in this matter confirm the genuineness of these passages in the synoptic Gospels, much as one might be tempted to wish them to be spurious.

(1) The abrupt termination of the Book of Acts before the death of St. Paul, and so before the destruction of Jerusalem, points to the date of the Book of Acts being the date of St. Paul's living at Rome in his own hired house. The Gospel of St. Luke, being written earlier than the Acts, was in that case written before the destruction of Jerusalem, and, if so, the common

source of these passages quoted by both Matthew, Mark, and Luke must have been in existence earlier still.

(2) No forger would have inserted passages containing predictions which were to be fulfilled during the lifetime of that generation after it had passed away and the predictions were falsified.

But however strong the foregoing evidence may be to show that Christ shared as regards these Messianic expectations the mental environment of his times, this fact, when fully realised, only enhances the importance of what the same synoptic Gospels tell us was the remarkable moral attitude of Christ himself towards the Messianic predictions of the prophets.

He seems not always to have regarded them as to be fulfilled to the letter. The closing prediction of the last of the prophets was the 'coming of Elijah' before the 'Great Day of the Lord.' It was thrown in his teeth that Elias must first come. 'Yes' (his reply was), 'but *if ye can receive it* Elias has come already.' One had come in the spirit and power of Elias.

Twice was he asked by his disciples to say more exactly WHEN the predictions were to be fulfilled, and twice he acknowledged his ignorance to them. His first reply was that he himself *did not know*. Only his Father knew. But that 'wheresoever the carcase was there would he eagles be gathered together.' His second

reply was : ' It is not for you to know the times and seasons which the Father keeps in his own hand.'

Once again he was asked by the Pharisees the same question, When the Kingdom of God should come ? And his reply to the Pharisees was : ' The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation . . . the Kingdom of God is within you ' [is already begun in men's hearts !] (Luke vii. 20).

These passages surely show that, while he repeated the old Hebrew prophecies, according to current views as yet to be fulfilled, he directly disclaimed any personal knowledge and power of prediction as inherent in himself.

And what in his view was the ' Kingdom ' on the approach of which he so often dwelt ? There ought to be no doubt about it, because again and again he illustrated it in his parables. These were by their very words and nature parables of ' the Kingdom.'

His habitual use in their outside machinery (so to speak) of the current Messianic ideas and phraseology cannot surely blind the candid enquirer to the obvious facts :—

(1) That the real aim of the parables was not to unveil the outward course of things in the future to idle curiosity, but to prepare people morally for entering into the Kingdom.

(2) That his conception of the *moral* character of the Kingdom rose like a rocket above the horizon of his time.

That his conception of the Kingdom of God

was that it was a *moral* kingdom is shown by the reiteration of the language of the Lord's Prayer: 'Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'; the one clause being his definition of the other. Again, the opening words of his 'Sermon on the Mount' describe the *moral* character of those for whom the Kingdom was prepared. Still further, his conception of the Kingdom in its relation to the gradual *moral* development of the race formed the special subject of at least two parables: that of the little seed which was to become a great tree, and that of the leaven which was gradually to work till the whole lump was leavened. And how wonderfully true to the moral course of things these conceptions were need not be dwelt upon.

Then, again, as to the grounds of his own identification of himself with the predicted Messiah, whose reign under God was to be 'the Kingdom,' surely they were essentially *moral* grounds.

Moses had spoken of him. 'A prophet shall arise *like unto me*.' Abraham had seen his day and rejoiced. His forerunner was to have *the spirit of Elijah*. The later Isaiah had described the *spirit of the despised and rejected servant of God*—the true Messiah. *Christ's spirit was morally one with all these.* And therefore he was conscious that he was God's messenger—the Son of Man, the predicted Messiah. Therefore he could say with full assurance, 'Come unto me . . . *for I am meek and lowly in heart.*'

Therefore he knew 'the Son of Man must suffer many things.' Therefore he could give up his soul unto death, conscious that he should claim his spoil with the strong. Therefore he could without any sense of presumption, in all humility, and with a confidence which eighteen centuries of further human history has not belied, but justified, claim a kingship over the hearts of men in his own and all future ages far more glorious in its actual realisation, and far more fully answering to his *moral* aspirations, than would have been the literal fulfilment of the current Messianic expectations of his day based upon the visions of Hebrew prophecy.

II

Christ's Attitude towards Current Views of the Future State

It has been shown that the Messianic expectations of the Jews influenced also their views as regards the life after death. Christ seems to have simply adopted the view current among the Rabbis of his time of the intermediate state in Hades in his parable of The rich man and Lazarus. He there places Lazarus in Paradise, in Abraham's bosom, and the rich man in the flames of Gehenna, and the gulf between, just as any Jewish Rabbi might have done.

And this is the more remarkable because, as it

has already been mentioned, this conception seems to have been of Persian origin, and certainly is not traceable to any of the sacred books of the Jewish canon.

But that Christ's own faith rose morally out of these current Jewish conceptions into a far higher and purer region may be inferred from the fact that when his time of departure came, although the word 'Paradise' had been upon his lips in replying to the dying thief so lately, he did not consign himself into Abraham's bosom, but, rising through and above all sensual conceptions and current imaginations of another life, chose rather to rely upon the broad *moral* ground of trust in God, committing his spirit into the hands of his 'Father.'

Keble surely caught the true meaning of his dying words when he wrote :—

> The soul that seemed forsaken
> Felt her present God again,
> And in her Father's arms
> Contented died away!

The moral character of Him whom he delighted to describe, in the language of the highest human instincts, as a 'Father' he felt to be a surer rock to trust to than any current conceptions of what another world is like.

And here, too, was a moral ground of hope and trust as regards the eternal future for other men also, which, as it far transcended in truth and certainty so was destined also to outlive the failure of one after another popular theory on the subject.

It was impossible that any popular conception of Paradise resting on the cosmogony of that age and of any succeeding age should hold its own when the cosmogony was found to fail. The terrestrial Paradise and Hades of the Rabbis and of Plato could not outlive the limited geography of the times. The empyrean heavens of the mediæval theologians—the new sphere added by them to the other spheres of the astronomers and placed outside of all, as Erasmus satirically remarked, 'so that there might be space enough for happy souls to play at ball,'—could not outlive the Ptolemaic system of the universe. It must die when the crystalline spheres vanished at the touch of science.

But the future—the heaven—involved in a perfect moral trust in the Eternal Goodness which, and which alone, could be trusted to do what was morally best for a moral being after death, was practically independent of all changes in human cosmogonies and could outlive them all!

III

Christ's Attitude towards the Hebrew Scriptures and the Mosaic Law

ENOUGH has already been said to show that Christ shared the mental environment of the Jews of his time in the current view which attributed to the Hebrew Scriptures an almost plenary

Divine inspiration, and altogether divorced the separate books from their true historical setting. These books were apparently to him, as to the ordinary Jew, 'the Law' and 'the Prophets,' and 'the Psalms.'

Whatever was to be found in the Pentateuch he naturally ascribed to Moses. The 'Prophets' seem to have been quoted by him without regard to their historical relations, dates, or original intentions. The 'Psalms' were the voice of David. Nor need anyone wish to explain this away. There is every reason to believe that it was really so, and that, as already seen, the reliance on ancient predictions which led his outward expectation astray was the result of the adoption of this current theory of Scripture interpretation, and not of any *original* interpretation given to them by Christ. The machinery of historic criticism was not yet born which alone could have corrected what was not true to fact in this theory of Scripture interpretation.

And this view of the sacred books, as throughout uniformly inspired Divine revelation, carried with it other visible results too.

The Mosaic Law, with its temple, its priesthood, its ritual, was apparently in the same way simply accepted by Christ, as by any other Jew, as Divine throughout. He strongly repudiated the charge that he had come to destroy it.

But the more fully and honestly this is admitted the more it enhances the importance of the fact which cannot be concealed, how far Christ

rose *morally* out of all subservience to the Mosaic Law, whenever it touched his spiritual freedom. He knew that within it was a spirit, a moral tone, far transcending in moral elevation the meaning which current interpretations gave it. The remarkable moral identity between the spirit of Moses and his own has already been alluded to. Both were meek and lowly in heart, and Christ was evidently conscious that in no ordinary sense both were Divine messengers. But he was conscious also that 'the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.' It was the spirit, the moral tone in the Mosaic Law, that he recognised and reiterated as Divine and Eternal, and the lifting up of *this* to the people was what gave such moral grandeur to the simple words of his 'Sermon on the Mount.'

'Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets. Not one jot or one tittle shall pass away till all be fulfilled!' This was his protest in his 'Sermon on the Mount.'

But how fulfilled?

With what sublime confidence did he proceed to fulfil it *morally*, apparently unconscious or careless that by this lifting up and fulfilling of its spirit he was leaving its letter, its ritual, its temple, and priesthood far behind, neglected, as it were, on the roadside of moral progress to crumble and die!

He is loyal as a Jew to the Temple and its rites. He comes up to the feasts. He pays the Temple dues. He commends the widow's mite

cast into the treasury. He indignantly clears the sacred courts of the traders and money-changers. He speaks of the Temple as 'My Father's house.' He makes it the place of his daily teaching. He bids the leper go up and make such offerings in the Temple as the law required. And yet in his moral fulfilment of the law the Temple has no place. He rises right above it! He leaves no room for temple ritual or priesthood. 'Go into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door pray unto thy Father who is in secret, and he shall reward thee openly!'

And the same thing may be noticed even as regards that, to the Jew, most sacred of all portions of the law, its very arcanum, the *Decalogue*. How his moral insight seizes at once upon its spirit, and insists upon the realisation of *that*! He prefers the *moral* version of it reduced to two commandments—the love of God and of thy neighbour—in obedience to which its real fulfilment lies. Mark, too, what a widened definition of the word 'neighbour' he imports into it, making it include even 'enemies,' in spite of the hatred of enemies again and again expressed by the Psalmists in their Psalms. Who is thy neighbour? He utters one of his most remarkable parables to explain this.

> It is he whom thou hast power
> To aid and bless!

Again, what a free view he asserted upon the fourth commandment in the Decalogue, by act and by word, taking pains *not* to keep it with

Pharisaic strictness, going even out of his way to offend the Sabbatarians, making known that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.

Contrast his minimising of the obligation of *this* commandment with the way in which he extends and pushes to its very roots the obligation of a *moral* commandment like the seventh !

Nay, we even find him on moral points apologising for the low moral tone of the law of Moses by the plea that the lower standard was allowed because of the hardness of Hebrew hearts, and warning Jewish laymen of his own day that except their righteousness should exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees they should in no case enter the Kingdom of God.

In a word, there was in this attitude of Christ to the Mosaic Law, notwithstanding his apparent acceptance of the current Rabbinical view of its sanctity, at the same time a *moral freedom* which, when the need came and the times were ripe for it, justified the Apostles and their successors in treating it as of *national* obligation only, and not to be enforced as a yoke upon the Gentiles. And there was also in this attitude even to the sacred Scriptures as a whole, notwithstanding his apparent acceptance of their uniform Divine inspiration, what justified the Christians of the second or third century in not thinking it sacrilege to add a New Testament to the Old ; just as it justified more modern Christians also in bodily associating with Old and New Testaments in their Christian

worship their liturgies and collections of sacred hymns. And yet at the same time there was, on the other hand, nothing in Christ's attitude or example to justify anyone then or now in clinging to any belief which is out of harmony with the true Christian spirit or the perfect moral goodness of the Divine character, or which is found to be inconsistent with truth, however made known, on the plea that it may be supported by quotations from hymns, prayer-books, or Old and New Testament Scriptures. All these must of necessity partake of the temporary peculiarities and infirmities belonging to various mental environments, and therefore their highest moral aim can only be fulfilled age after age, as Christ fulfilled the highest moral aim of the 'Law' and the 'Prophets,' by rising morally out of and beyond their human infirmities, by departing, if needs be, from their letter in order to follow the higher guidance of their spirit.

IV

The Attitude of Christ to Miracles

THERE is a still more remarkable and crucial point upon which the student of the New Testament, seeking for truth and nothing else, can hardly fail to see that Christ shared the mental environment of his age and country whilst rising morally above it, viz. as regards *miracles*.

It is now the all but universal belief of intelligent people that those mental phenomena which used to be and are still, in some countries, attributed to demoniacal possession, are due to physical disease of the brain and the nervous system so intimately connected therewith.

It is also well known that many other diseases are more or less connected with the nervous system, and are sometimes cured by anything which reinvigorates it or rouses it to unwonted energy. Thus paralysis has been sometimes cured by a sudden shock or call upon the energy of the nervous system.

The large collection of facts recently made in a purely medical treatise without any theological object shows that, even in recent times, a strong *faith* that a cure will follow the remedy (whatever it be) often *produces the cure* by its effect through the brain on the nervous and muscular systems. There is abundant evidence of this in such varied instances as the numerous cures following the prayers of Prince Hohenlohe, and the effect produced by administering innocent medicines when believed to be real ones by the patient. The power of the brain to produce even sudden results upon the body is illustrated by numerous facts, such as the removal of many kinds of local physical maladies by concentration of the mind of the patient, produced by artificial means, upon the diseased part ; the actual production of inflammatory wounds on persons by the vivid mental realisation of an accident or damage

occurring to another; the successful use of charms in removing warts, &c.

Now this actual and natural wonder-working power of *faith,* or of the mind upon the body, accounts for the fact so universally recorded in history that wherever there is present a person of commanding authority inspiring belief in his supernatural character and power, there are sure to be found cases of supposed miracle. Not only do the Gospels present nothing unique in this respect, but they are absolutely in harmony with the history of almost every other person at all approaching in character and dignity the person of Christ. History, and especially ecclesiastical history, is literally *full of miraculous cures,* and if the Gospels had not recorded them they would have been all but miraculously unique.

Anyone who reads the history of any great religious awakening like that of modern Irish revivalists, the preaching of Irving, of Wesley, or of other religious enthusiasts, will find abundant proof that anything which brings men into the supposed presence of the supernatural, such as the expectation of an immediate Messianic advent or imminent hell, will naturally produce upon men, and especially women of weak nerves, a state almost identical with what used to be considered as demoniacal possession. The physical phenomena of modern religious revivals are but faint echoes of those produced under the preaching of Wesley. In his journal are vivid and terrible descriptions of scores of cases which he himself

believed to be cases of diabolical possession. The preaching of Tauler in the fourteenth century also produced some curious physical results very much like those produced in modern religious revivals.

Add to these facts the contagious character of belief in the supernatural, the fact that every coincidence in such times seems a supernatural event, and that stories of wonders are sure to grow in the process of tradition from mouth to mouth, and the presence of miracles in the record of the life of a great religious teacher becomes not only one of the most natural things in the world, but also in superstitious times a necessary result which nothing but a miracle could prevent from occurring.

Who after full consideration of these facts would defend for a moment the view so strangely current among Christians, and also those who reject Christianity, viz. that miracles are the only proof by which a Divine being could substantiate a revelation as Divine ?

Why, surely, from a modern scientific and common-sense point of view no proof could be more precarious—nay, more, no difficulty could be well urged more fatal against a revelation claiming to be Divine than its resting its claim solely or even mainly upon the evidence of miracles. The fact is, that Christianity is the only religion which we do not repudiate because of its miracles ; and that it should be able to sustain its ground in spite of its miracles is indeed a proof how great a strain its moral truth enables it to bear.

But admit the fact that Christ shared in this respect also (belief in the miraculous in general, and in demoniacal possession in particular) the mental environment—the current views—of his time (and unless miraculously preserved from it he must have done so), then the miracles find their natural place in the Gospels, and detract nothing from their honesty or general credibility.

The preaching of the advent of the Messiah, as 'nigh at hand,' the threats of the 'winnowing fan' and the 'refiner's fire,' which would 'purge away the dross' from among men, the warning to 'flee from the wrath to come,'—this preaching of John the Baptist, to whom 'all Judea and beyond Jordan,' flocked to listen—surely must, far more than the preaching of Wesley, naturally have produced an unusual frequency of cases of demoniacal possession. The presence of the Messiah himself would do the same still more. The expectation that the Messiah would heal the sick would naturally produce that *faith* in his powers which would cure. The 'many' who were healed that we read of in the record of the eye-witness (if Mark was the scribe of Peter) naturally would grow into the 'all' of Luke, the compiler at second hand of a Gospel, however scrupulously honest. There need be no surprise at any amount of miracle attributed to Christ a generation after his death.

But the main point of importance is *Christ's own attitude towards miracles.*

It is strange—it is unique. He shares the belief in demoniacal possession and in the miraculous powers of the Messiah, and he believes himself to be the Messiah, and he sees that cures follow upon faith in his words. But :—

(1) He is not personally elated by the results of miraculous powers. He disclaims any consciousness that he is possessed of a power which his disciples may not equally possess, and attributes the cures not to any power inherent in himself but to the power exerted by God, who is 'with him' and works the mighty works.

(2) He refuses to use them capriciously, or so as to spare himself labour, sorrow or suffering.

(3) He is reluctant to use them except to relieve suffering ; rebukes the excited voices of demoniacs even when they publicly witness to his power, bidding them 'hold their peace,' and over and over again he enjoins secrecy to prevent notoriety and excitement. (How unlike Wesley and revivalists !)

(4) He habitually makes his physical cures subsidiary and secondary to that which was his real object—the *moral* cure of men's souls.

(5) He seems to have had a clear appreciation and to have made constant outspoken declarations of the fact that only when there was *faith* could there be cure. 'He could do no mighty works there because of their unbelief.' 'Perceiving that he had faith to be healed,' &c. 'Thy faith hath saved thee.' 'According to thy faith be it unto thee,' &c. . . . .

Add to these remarkable facts this most remarkable of all, viz. the low place he gave to miracles as proofs of his Messiahship and the low moral estimate he had of the moral state which demanded miracles. 'Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe.' 'A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign.' 'If they will not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe though one rose from the dead.' 'Then shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders. Believe them not.' 'Then shall they say, Have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and done many wonderful works, but he shall answer, I never knew you. Depart from me ye that work iniquity!' 'Rejoice not that the devils are subject unto you, but that your names are written in Heaven.'

These things all show that while undoubtedly Christ seems, so far as the synoptic Gospels may be trusted, to have shared the current theory of demoniacal possession and the supernatural character of wonderful cures resulting from faith in him, as a part of the mental environment of the age, he nevertheless instinctively distrusted the moral value of miracles and abstained from building upon them the foundations of his kingdom.

V

The Attitude of Christ towards the Laws of Nature and Physical Evils

ANOTHER point may, perhaps, need special mention.

No question has puzzled the minds of religious men more than the problem involved in the Divine meaning and intention of physical evils.

That physical evils were sent upon man in punishment for sins committed seemed to the ancient mind the necessary corollary to the theory of Divine Providence. But it was observed that evils came upon the good as well as the evil, and this was the problem which is left unsolved and declared to be insoluble as well by the Hebrew book of Job as the ' Heracles furens ' of Euripides.

Modern science has disarmed or exorcised nature of any supposed moral intent in physical events. Men are beginning to admit now that events in physical nature happen according to physical laws.

Christ had no scientific light to guide him to this conclusion. Nevertheless he seems to have reached it *by his faith in the perfect moral character of God,* whose love he held to extend to those who hated as well as those who loved him.

' Be ye also *perfect* as my Father in heaven is perfect, for he maketh his sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sendeth his rain on the just and the unjust.'

Here we have the recognition, as it were, of a Divine impartiality in the laws of nature.

Again, his followers were to expect tribulation, even as he himself was acquainted with grief. He and they must needs be treated by an unjust world as Plato had foreseen the just man would be. It followed from this that *affliction* was not *retribution*, as men had so often held. It was to be taken by his followers as assuredly no sign of Divine displeasure. It was rather the outward mark of the true servant of God in a world of wickedness.

Again, the question was asked as regards bodily affliction: 'Who hath sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' The answer was '*Neither*.'

The same question was at another time asked as regards great tragedies and accidents which seem to the superstitious like Divine judgments. The men whose blood Pilate had mingled with the sacrifices, were they more wicked than other Jews? 'I tell you *nay*.' Those on whom the tower of Siloam fell, were they more wicked than others? '*No*.' Thus did Christ plainly declare that these calamities and accidents are not blows aimed by a Divine punitive hand as chastisement upon sin. They have no moral intent. But the man who would not be harmed by them must be always prepared for whatever sudden event may come.

In the meantime, when afflictions come, his teaching was that there is good cheer in the *Divine moral sympathy* which, to the tender heart of Christ, seemed to embrace, not only men but

also even the brute creation in its range. And what Christian shall dare to say that it does not ?

VI

The Moral Basis of Christ's New Code of Truthfulness

TAKE again the moral step gained by Christ for mankind in the matter of uprightness and truthfulness—one of the highest products of civilisation surely.

The Jewish and Greek mind (and the same thing is observed by missionaries of almost all uncivilised nations) gloried in clever cunning and deceit practised to overreach a foe.

Abraham in Egypt told an untruth about his wife to deceive Pharaoh. The sin of Jacob was mean deceit. The sin of Joseph's brethren was long-sustained deceit. David slew Uriah the Hittite by cunningly devised deceit. Elisha practised deceit, and so did Jeremiah. The cunning of Odysseus was what made him a popular hero among the Greeks. The Phædra of Euripides, who died rather than sin, held a lying letter in her dying hand. Some sense of the nobleness of truth is shown, indeed, in the Neoptolemus of Sophocles; but then Philoctetes was a fellow-Greek and not an alien.

But with Christ the virtue of upright truthfulness rises to a new elevation.

'Let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay.' So truthful should the Christian be that even an oath is surplusage.

And St. Paul, in enforcing the high standard of his Master in this particular, expresses in a word the root and meaning of it: 'Speak every man truth with his neighbour, *for we are all members one of another.*' This necessity for *truth* came, then, with Christ's intense recognition of the Divine love for the race and the moral brotherhood of all mankind.

VII

His Freedom from Two Main Errors of Christians of Future Ages

It may be well also to note how the high moral nature of Christ, resting upon his conviction of the Divine perfect moral goodness, lifted him above errors not only of the past but of the future.

No error has perhaps so perverted all religions from their true moral aim as the *sacerdotal* error which interposes priest and ritual in the path of spiritual worship; and how completely he made the religion of his followers independent of Temple, priesthood, and sacrifices has already been alluded to.

Again, what error has cramped the Christian Church more fatally than the substitution of faith in a creed for a moral attitude of soul? The intolerance of rival sects, the Inquisition, and the

stake have come from this. The Antinomianism of Calvinistic sects has also come from this.

But did Christ lay the foundation of this error? Did *he* make belief in a creed, or even in *himself*, the one key to heaven, or unorthodoxy or even want of knowledge of himself the crime which should be the wholesale cause of eternal perdition?

In his Sermon on the Mount he gave no blessing to the correct creed, but expended all his blessings on qualities of heart. And so, too, in his final parable of 'the sheep and goats' the blessing was given to the same qualities of heart, *even though those who possessed them were not conscious of having exercised them towards him.*

And this is all the more striking because it is a fact, of which Christ seems to have been conscious beforehand, that no power has ever been seen in the whole history of the human race so powerful to produce these qualities of heart as that which comes from belief in him. Such a power has Divine goodness to evoke goodness in those who come near enough to it to believe in it and to catch its contagion!

VIII

Christ laid the Foundations of a New Polity which is that towards which Modern Civilisation is Tending

Nor should it be forgotten that these points in which Christ, whilst sharing the mental, rose above

the moral environment of his time, were points on which turned, not merely the good of individual souls but the polity of nations. His teaching not only produced a change in the moral character of individuals so great that it was described as a 'new birth,' a 'being born again,' but also founded principles of polity which turned the course of civilisation into a new groove—*the* groove in which it is still moving towards a goal which even Christian nations have not as yet nearly reached. The very problem which is perplexing us now, which raises ever and anon Cassandra warnings of 'rocks ahead,' is one which Christianity has done more than anything else to raise, and which can only be solved by carrying out to its true end those moral laws which Christ laid down.

The Greek polity—the polity even of Plato's Republic—was, as has been seen, a scheme devised to make the world pay tribute for the happiness of a favoured few. All who were not Greeks were barbarians and their lawful prey. The laws of Athens were for the benefit of her citizens and not of her slaves, though Aristotle condemned slavery except as a training for freedom. The Roman Commonwealth, too, was a vast system of conquest and taxation of the world for the enrichment of Roman citizens; and the general extension of citizenship to the provinces came long after Christ, and too late to prevent the Empire's fall.

The Teutonic tribes, also, who overthrew the Roman Empire, however strong their domestic

virtues, extirpated or enslaved the people whose lands they conquered.

And it must be confessed that Christian nations have too often done likewise. Being human in frailty they too have been inhuman and selfish in policy. Their internal polity has failed to reach and too often even to aim at the common-weal. Their treatment of the unenfranchised has often been unjust. Their oppression of uncivilised races has been and is too often barbarous. But in so far as this is so the conduct of these half-Christian nations is avowedly *un-christian !*

The genius of Christianity from the very first shot above all this. It was not that its first exultant zeal and rash expectation of a speedy physical Messianic reign misled it at its outset into a sort of Communistic experiment which had no root, and so soon died, but that the reform made by Christ in the moral theory of true human society and polity was so searching and radical that of inherent necessity its little seed must grow on and its leaven work till in ages after, and ages still future, perhaps even now, human society wherever truly Christian must be a true commonwealth. In the first generation of Christians runaway slaves broke the bread of Christian brotherhood with their masters, but the struggle of Christian feeling with slavery seems even now to be only approaching its end.

The fact remains that from the most exclusive of nations, kept apart from the Gentile world by

the conceit of special Divine favouritism on the part of a National God, and wrapped up within itself in the narrowest spiritual pride—from this nation sprang the seed of a kingdom in which there should be 'neither Greek nor Jew, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free.' And it was Christ's high sense of the Divine moral goodness to all men alike which, implying as it did as a corollary the common brotherhood of men, gave to Christianity the power to rule the politics as well as the religion of the future.

IX

The Recognition of the Extent to which Christ Shared the Mental Environment of His Day is the Recognition of a Fact in Harmony with the Moral Object of Christianity and gives a New Sense of Reality to the Life of Christ

SEVERAL instances have now been given, and, it must be admitted, not trivial but *crucial* instances, in all of which, according to the synoptic Gospels, Christ seems to have shared the current conceptions, the mental environment of the pious Jew of his time, whilst in all of them as in many others most unmistakably he rose, *morally*, high as a rocket above the ordinary level.

The recognition of the fact that to so large an extent Christ shared the imperfect mental environment of the pious Jew of his time may, at first

sight, seem both to the Christian and to the unfriendly critic of Christianity a virtual surrender of the centre and basis of the Christian Hypothesis.

To both it may at first sight seem to be a direct and decisive blow to Christian faith, and accordingly to the one it may cause grief and pain, and to the other satisfaction and even triumph.

But it appears to the present writer that such feelings must undergo a change if the facts of the case be looked at with a more searching and steady gaze.

For when at the outset of this enquiry an attempt was made to draw a distinction between Christianity and its ever-changing environments, it was found to be certainly true that the moral power of Christianity was not dependent upon these environments any more than the power of a man is dependent on his clothes, but that the moral power of Christianity rested upon the conception it gave to men of the *moral* character of the Divine Being and the sense of man's *moral* relation to Him. It was further shown that whenever the sense of the Divine moral goodness is really brought home to men, those moral emotions are evoked which are the motive-power producing the highest development of individual social and political life.

It was when Christianity was thus regarded as a moral force working for the moral development of the race according to the natural laws of moral dynamics that its harmony with the facts of physical evolution and all that we know from the

discoveries of modern science became apparent. And in like manner it now seems to be only when the same distinction is observed throughout, *even in regard to the person of Christ,* that his unique relation to the whole course of human moral development becomes consistent with its general tenor, and the records of his life are seen to present a solid basis of fact.

For we have seen that according to the synoptic Gospels Christ was evidently conscious that the work of Christianity was a moral work resulting from the recognition by man of the Divine moral goodness.

His Jewish mental environment could not dim the brightness of his moral vision as to this. And he was able, as a matter of fact, in spite of that environment, to bring the Divine moral goodness so far within the range of men's convictions as to produce that recognition of it which has turned the moral course of things into a higher groove.

If it were a question of speculation to-day whether the infirmities of an imperfect mental environment would not cripple the moral power of Christianity and cause it to fail, then it might be otherwise. But as it is a fact that Christianity *has* exerted this power, notwithstanding the imperfections of the mental environments of Christ and of Christians, the fear, the grief, the pain, on the one hand, and the triumph on the other, are alike misplaced. It may, therefore, be expected that like the shudder with which weak nerves look back

upon the dangers of the path which has after all been safely travelled, they will pass away when the nervous system is restored to its true balance.

The fact is that Christianity did not die because the second coming in the clouds never came, because prophecies failed and miracles ceased, because the law and the prophets found only a moral fulfilment. And a very little reflection will show that Christianity lived because its life was independent of all those mortal parts of its environment. For it is an obvious fact that the moral life of Christianity has itself had a large share in producing and aiding the process of disintegration in the environments, and could no more have lived if they had not died than an oak can grow up without bursting the acorn.

Who, on the other hand, can describe the added sense of reality and the added pathos, which is, by this recognition of facts as they really were, given to the life of Christ ?

Instead of a magic personality supernaturally guarded and screened from those trials of life which spring from limited knowledge of the mysteries of the universe and of the future course of events ; instead of a dogmatic teacher whose claim to belief was a miraculous knowledge, which, if true, must involve a scientific infallibility not found in his words ; instead of a thaumaturgist claiming belief on the vulgar ground, so readily conceded by popular faith, of power to work miracles—all which jars as thoroughly with the moral rhythm

as it were of previous history and subsequent experience of the moral order of human development as it does with the facts of modern science, and above all with the spirit of Christ himself—instead of all this mythological glamour which gives such a sense of unreality to everything, how natural, how appealing to the very deepest feelings of human nature, is the actual life of Christ, as depicted in the synoptic Gospels and taken in all its simplicity as it was!

It is as though in these Gospels the growth could be watched of Christ's gentle spirit—one in its meekness and lowliness with Abraham and Moses and Elijah and 'the servant of God' described by the later Isaiah; like a tender plant growing up in the midst of the rank weeds and thorns of Hebrew human nature, in that hard Pharisaical cavilling generation, so bitter in its spirit against true moral good that John the Baptist described it as a 'generation of vipers,' so gross in its perceptions of moral truth as to be described by Christ himself as 'wicked and adulterous.' Its mission is to bear and shed a precious seed which in its turn is to struggle upward and grow till it becomes a great tree. The little leaven is to work little by little for thousands of years till it has leavened the whole lump.

The religious world of his day saw no form nor comeliness in his meek and lowly nature, no true credentials of Messiahship in that purity of heart to which the old prophet had said 'the Divine arm was revealed,' no sign of Kingship over human

hearts in that tender-hearted sympathy which made instinctive acquaintance with poverty and grief, and claimed companionship with sorrow. They despised and rejected him as the same prophet had declared that the true servant of God is despised and rejected. They buffeted and spit upon and crucified him, as Plato had foreseen would be done to the truly just man, if ever such an one should appear among men.

But 1800 years of further history have shown that the Hebrew prophets were right when they declared that such an one so 'giving up his soul unto death should divide his spoil with the strong.' Never did any conqueror found such a kingdom as he did. Never did any royal benefactor of mankind so benefit men. His figure is unique, but, so far from being abnormal and eccentric, it has become the recognised type of the highest humanity and the central figure in history.

It is true that the great moral reformer of India may have still more followers than Christ. And there was, indeed, in one way a startling analogy between Christ's work and Buddha's, but linked with what a contrast !

Brahmanism in Buddha's time, like Judaism in Christ's, had become a religion of priests and sacrifices and ceremonies and castes. Instead of a gospel it was a prophecy of evil. The common people were burdened and wearied and heavy-laden with the nightmare of the future it held up before them.

The nightmare of the Brahman millions was

the eternal transmigration of souls. Buddha gave them a distant prospect of rest. If they would kill their natural instincts and passions in this life it was possible to reach the rest of Nirwana, *i.e* to be allowed to cease from the misery of being.

But this promise of rest gave no fresh energy to life. It was the religion begotten by despair of life. Buddha has at this moment more disciples than Christ, but the nations which have adopted his gospel seem doomed to stagnation and decay.

The nightmare of the Jewish nation was 'the fearful looking for judgment,' and the Gehenna into which the common people who 'knew not the law' and so 'were cursed,' feared to be 'cast away' when the kingdom of God should come.

The Scribes and Pharisees and priests put upon them ceremonial burdens which they would not help them with a little finger to bear. To the priest-ridden, wearied, and heavy-laden people Christ, like Buddha, promised rest. He, too, told how the sensuous and selfish instincts of man might be conquered ; but his method was not the negative one of destroying instincts, but the positive method of rightly directing them. Setting forth to them the Divine moral goodness, and so winning their love to God, instead of inspiring their fear, he dispelled their nightmares and produced a religious revolution of which we can hardly estimate the power and extent. They needed no Temple, for their Father in secret needed only to be worshipped in secret—in spirit and in truth. They needed no priests and

sacrifices, for their Father in heaven already loved them. Thenceforth the *raison d'être* of the Temple, its priests and sacrifices, and the legal thraldom of the Rabbinical system were swept away. No wonder he was hated by Scribes and Pharisees! To those who loved in return, that love became a motive which gave and would give for ever new interest and energy in life—a master passion which would of itself overmaster their selfishness and sin, and so give them peace and rest. It would nerve them for a life of toil and work and service. But the yoke would be easy and the burden light, because it was in harmony with the very life of things. It was, in fact, taking place and step in the march of the Divine order of human progress and development.

Into the depths of Christ's personal religious experience, and into the mysteries of the nature and origin and unique relation of the person of Christ to the Divine, which have ever engaged the minds of theologians, it is not the purpose of this essay to enquire. There are subjects upon which dogmatic assertion and dogmatic negation are equally out of place. For the present purpose the *moral* unity is all sufficient. As to the rest, there is no plummet in human hands with which to sound what have been aptly described as the 'abysmal depths of personality.'

Be these as they may, it is more to the present purpose to call attention to the fact that this love of God, which it was Christ's mission to evoke, and

which, so evoked by him, was to become a new power of life in the moral development of the human race, he seems to have sought to evoke *naturally*, and not *super*naturally. So far as can be observed he does not seem to have sought to produce it by miracle or magic influences, but in the only way in which by law of nature it could be evoked, viz. by the power of his own love of God and of men. Spurned as he was by the wise and prudent, the Scribes and Pharisees, who were too proudly wrapped up in the environment of their Rabbinical wisdom and traditions to love him or God, he turned to the common people, the sinners, the publicans. Some of these saw how he loved God and loved men, and so were won over to the love of God and him. Thus he left behind him a few disciples of whom little could be said *but* that they loved. And these by telling of his love of God and men, and proving their own in their lives, brought others to love him and God too.

This was his simple mode of procedure, but it will be seen at once that the essential point in it was not only the fact that he loved men proved to the death, but *the proof he gave of the love of God*. His love for God and also of men kindled in men's hearts a love not only of himself but also of God, and how could it have been otherwise ?

The *modus operandi* of moral influence and of the recognition of it has already been examined. It was shown that there are certain emotions which are evoked by the presence of moral

goodness, and that it is their involuntary action which makes them good evidence of the presence of the moral goodness by which they are evoked.

What proof, then, could Christ tender to men of the Divine moral goodness higher and more convincing than the proof given by the emotions evoked in his own heart in response to that moral goodness ?

What greater proof can a man give of the goodness of another than the manifest love he bears towards him ?

It is a matter of fact that so deep and evident was the love of Christ to God that it was an effective proof to his disciples of God's love and goodness. In other words, they believed in his belief when they saw that so certain and complete was his conviction of the perfect goodness of God, that it evoked in him a love which made it his very meat and drink to do what he felt to be his Father's will. So evident indeed and so strong was his conviction of the Divine love, not to himself only, but to *men*—his fellow-men of all nations and times—and the love towards them evoked in his heart was so deep, so tender, so unmistakable, and, above all, so melting to human hearts, that even now, after eighteen hundred years have passed, the very mention of his name will often bring a tear into the eye of the brave and strong who have learned, perhaps, in the school of sorrow and grief the preciousness of sympathy such as his !

Nor can a love so powerful and so tender be

confounded with a mere natural benevolence evoked by the qualities or even the ideal possibilities of that human nature by which he was surrounded. The human nature of Galilee or Judea was hardly *so* lovable as to evoke by any ordinary process such love as Christ's. The source of his love of men was evidently his love of God. Because he conceived of men as the children of the Divine Father, and of *Him* as yearning for their good, suffering for their sins, bearing their evil in patient sorrow, and working through the ages for their moral regeneration; and because his own heart beat in perfect response to these feelings, and he felt himself to be entirely one in moral purpose with God; therefore he loved men with the same Divine love as his Father, and shared the suffering and sorrow for their sin, and yearned and worked to the death for their moral regeneration, as only a Saviour could. Men saw this. There was no concealment or doubt about it. And hence came the winning power of his life and death. Hence, also, *his* sacrifice became to men as *God's* sacrifice, with moral power to draw the world after him to God. Hence, too, his apostles, catching his spirit and obeying his commands, declared themselves to be 'ambassadors for Christ, praying and beseeching men in Christ's stead to be reconciled to *God*.'

Here, indeed, was an inversion of the old heathen view of sacrifice, as marvellous as it was complete. Instead of men bringing their sacrifices to appease an angry and vindictive Deity,

here the Deity against whom men had sinned seemed to be bringing, as it were, in Christ's person *his* sacrifice to appease men's fear and hatred of Him, proving to them thereby His own Fatherly Goodness, kneeling, as it were, in Divine humility, to them, praying and beseeching them to return to the Divine goodness and love, and to become themselves lovely and good.

No wonder that such love as this, with such an origin, and inspiring such new hopes for mankind, had power to move the hearts of those to whom it was brought home—that it still can draw tears of penitence and inspire lifelong devotion. The cause is obviously adequate to produce the effect.

Nor should it be lost sight of that Christ, however unique his religious experience must have been to make it produce so complete and entire conviction and sense of moral unity with the Divine Goodness, claimed for men as well as for himself the same possibility of contact with it which he himself had experienced. Let each in his closet in secret lay open his heart to the Father in secret ; and Christ's teaching was, not that the veil of secrecy should be withdrawn, not that any vision or sensuous perception would be given of that which perhaps by law of nature can only be morally discerned, but that he would be openly rewarded by an accession of moral strength to do that Will which he was taught to pray might be done.

It would, therefore, be a great mistake to regard the power of Christianity as resting solely

on an isolated historical fact, or even on a life ended 1800 years ago. Christ claimed that it would be a continuous power to the end of the world, and it will be readily conceded that if his conviction in this respect was well grounded—*i.e.* if the Christian hypothesis be true—if the Divine moral goodness be in fact *there* to rekindle, as it were, by its sympathy the flame of human love when the human heart is turned towards it—then it was not an idle expectation on Christ's part that Christianity would not die with his death, but work on like leaven till it had leavened the whole lump.

And Christianity has not died!

Where, therefore, but in the experience of sixty generations of Christians can the reality and truth of that on which he trusted be fairly examined and tested? In the meantime, surely, there is a strong *primâ facie* case for enquiry, and at least no reason why its results should be prejudged as necessarily barren. For here is a moral force imported into the world—changing the direction and course of history—springing from the heart of Christ, spreading to his disciples, making a handful of poor and unlettered fishermen morally powerful enough to go out, as Christ himself described it, as a little flock of sheep in the midst of wolves, not to be devoured but to conquer, giving to Christianity such moral power in the moral development of men that it outlived and is outliving all that was imperfect and mortal in its Jewish environment —that it outlived the death of the Mosaic ritual

and the destruction of the Sacred City and the depopulation of the land of its birth; that it entered into struggle with Greek philosophy and absorbed all that was pure and true in it, making out of it a Neoplatonic environment for itself; that it entered into struggle with the hostile Roman Empire and triumphantly became its public religion; that when Roman civilisation fell under the scourge of Teutonic hordes it entered into intimate relations with them too, overcame their pagan religions, and, enlisting their strong domestic affections into its service, became their moral regenerator and gave them power to lead the civilisation of Western Europe and of the New Worlds beyond.

PART IV

SURVEY OF THE MAIN FACTS OF HUMAN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Continued

THE SIXTY GENERATIONS OF CHRISTIANS

I

The Christianity and Mental Environment of the Apostles

THAT the apostles, still more than Christ, must have been influenced by their Jewish mental environment will now be readily admitted.

But the fact is that very little is known certainly of the history of the apostles, and least of all of those who laboured in Asia where Jewish influence was most certain to be strongest, and where the Judaising party obtained to all appearance the upper hand. Hardly anything is known of the experience of Christianity in its struggle with the Judaism of Babylon or the Buddhism of non-Jewish converts. And yet the fact, that soon after the Christian era stories recorded of Christ

in the Gospels are found also told of Buddha in the East, points to a Christian influence having extended far into those regions which now for more than a decade of centuries have been lost to Christendom. On the other hand, the traces of Eastern philosophy in the metaphysical disputes and heresies of early Church history clearly show that Christianity had taken as well as given in its contact with Asiatic faiths.

But there happens to be one apostolic life—and that perhaps the most important to European Christians, in that it had most to do with themselves and the establishment of their own faith—still accessible and open to study in remarkable detail, and supported by testimony singularly trustworthy.

It will be sufficient for the purposes of this enquiry to trace the effect of the Jewish environment in the experience of St. Paul.

No one can doubt that throughout the Epistles of St. Paul there is clearly visible an adherence to the outward Messianic expectation of a speedy second coming of Christ in the clouds. That is, he evidently had to contend in his religious experiences with the same environment which Christ himself had to encounter, and which furnished the outward framework of his parables. And, lest this should for one moment be attributed to Christ instead of to the current Jewish environment, it may be well to place side by side for comparison the apocalyptic expectations of Daniel (Daniel vii.) and of St. Paul (2 Thess. i.).

DANIEL VII.

And the Ancient of days did sit. His throne was like fiery flame. . . . I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed and given to the burning flame.

. . . . . .

And behold one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven. And there was given him a dominion, and glory, and kingdom, which shall not pass away. The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom . . . but the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people and the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.

2 THESS. I.

The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God . . . who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord . . . when he shall come to be glorified in his saints.

Any right understanding of apostolic history, as of the history of Christ, must therefore recognise throughout and thoroughly that this Messianic expectation of what would happen at 'the end of the age'—including the utter destruction as by fire of all evil and opposing kingdoms, persons, and things, and the reign of the Messiah and his saints for ever and ever—was pre-Christian, and adopted by Christ and the apostles as a part of that Jewish mental environment which came to them with their mother's milk, and for which they were not in anywise responsible. The point to mark is,

that implicitly as they mentally believed it, they *morally* rose far above it.

The belief of the apostles was that Christ was still living in closest union with the Divine Goodness in the 'secret,' but not to them less real, life beyond the grave which they spoke of as, even to themselves, 'the life to come.' It mattered little to them in one sense whether they waited for it and their reunion with Christ till his expected 'coming in the clouds,' or previously joined him in it by an earlier death. In either case lives of devotion, such as theirs, to the work he had given them to do were but the natural result of their faith. To them necessarily and naturally, 'to live was Christ, and to die was gain.'

It would be an entire mistake to conclude that the intensity of their devotion was the fruit of the nearness of the expected 'coming in the clouds.' It was the result of their intense personal attachment to Christ, and through him to the Eternal Goodness.

There was to them, especially as time went on, something even of tired expectation in the thought that one or more of them might have to '*tarry*' till Christ came. St. Paul felt that 'to be with him' *at once* would be 'far better.' And as the miraculous event, which according to their Jewish expectations seemed at first so near, moved like a mirage farther and farther forward into the future instead of drawing nearer as time went on, the natural flutterings of human hope attendant upon a sensuous expectation of sharing in the glory of

Christ's triumphant reign on earth were evidently more and more merged in the deeper spiritual hope and longing for that complete moral union with Christ, and through him with the Eternal Goodness, which would be more blessed still. No longer to see through a glass darkly, but to be like him, because they should 'see him as he is,' this became their moral vision of heaven, and one far dearer to their hearts than current sensuous expectations inspired by reliance on the letter of prophecy.

The Epistles of St. Paul are evidence enough that in spite of his Jewish environment he grasped fully, as Christ had done, the *moral* nature of the kingdom. To him, as to Christ, it was no mere glorification or triumph of the Jews as a nation. It was to be for all the world a kingdom of God—a reign of righteousness. And the motive power within him was his moral trust in God through Christ for all mankind—not the Jews only. His continual insisting on the moral difference between the old and the new man ; the deep earnestness of the moral teaching which bursts forth at the conclusion of all his Epistles, and which, holding up so high and pure a moral standard, was not mere exhortation, but also testimony to the *real moral change that Christianity was in fact effecting* as it spread ; the remarkable completeness of his freedom, though brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, from Jewish prejudices as regards the moral equality of the Gentiles with the Jews ; his equal freedom, though a Roman citizen, from all caste

feeling or scorn for the barbarian and the slave —these things show how fully he had entered into the moral spirit of his Master, and how morally he soared above the mere outward details of Messianic prophecy.

But, on the other hand, of necessity the Messianic expectation, to the first Christians who expected it to be realised in an outward miraculous way, suddenly and soon, must, like the preaching of John the Baptist and that of modern millenarian revivalists, have produced peculiar phenomena, human nature being such as it was and is. And there is evidence that it did.

Real and reported 'miraculous' cures attend the steps of the apostles in 'the Acts' of St. Luke as they do those of Christ in the Gospels, especially in those parts of the narrative where the absence of the pronoun 'we' shows that the writer was not an eye-witness.

Evidence of great religious excitement shows itself as well in the prevalence of 'unknown tongues' as in abnormal interference with the polity of daily life—the temporary 'community of goods' and abstention even from marriage.

The attitude of Christ to such phenomena as these has been noticed; but what was the attitude of St. Paul?

In St. Paul's own Epistles, with one or two slight exceptions, miracles and the abnormal mental phenomena deemed miraculous are ignored or mentioned only to be emphatically subordinated to the moral objects of Christianity.

'Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.' 'Though I speak with tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am nothing.' He had rather, he wrote, 'speak five intelligible words than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.' He had a strong sense that these things, whether miracles, prophecies, or tongues, should 'fail' and 'cease' (while charity never faileth)—that they did not belong to those moral realities of Christianity, which should last for ever.

And even in his mention of the resurrection and the various 'appearances' of Christ to the apostles, he evidently refuses to enter into the marvel of the resurrection as a miracle. What he seeks is evidence that Christ was 'risen' and still actually living, and he classes the appearance 'last of all' to himself in vision on the journey to Damascus, without hesitation, on a par with those appearances which had occurred before Christ's supposed ascension. That Christ was still really alive with God was what St. Paul cared about, not the miracle of the resurrection, and when asked 'how the dead are raised up and with what body do they come?' he shrank impatiently from so sensuous a question, and appealed to a natural, not a miraculous, analogy: 'Thou fool! why care about the body? Does not every seed, after it has been cast into the ground and has died, rise up with a new body according to the laws of God. But this I say—Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.'

Whilst, however, marking the moral triumph of St. Paul over his Jewish environment, it would be folly to refuse to see also how it sometimes bewildered him—how he was sometimes biased even in his moral judgments by having to explain to his many questioners points which arose from the eagerly-expected advent. It was so hard to uphold the moral steadfastness of those who, taking a sensuous view of things, *impatiently* waited for Christ ! Should they, *e.g.*, marry their daughters as though Christ were not coming for long, or keep them unmarried on the tip-toe of expectation ? To such a question there can be no doubt that St. Paul's answer was given with hesitation, as the result of a bewildered mind. There can be little doubt, too, that in his later Epistles to the Corinthians and Thessalonians he had to correct hasty judgments and impressions given in his earlier ones, and springing from the same source. But this enhances rather than detracts from the significance of the fact, that such in these Epistles of St. Paul is the prominence practically given to moral over speculative views of things that it has been, and is still, possible for Christians, now 1800 years after they were written, to read them and accept their high moral teaching almost without perceiving that framework of Messianic expectation which nevertheless is present everywhere, and gives a certain colouring of its own to them all.

Finally, what a pathetic likeness there is between the disappointed and at the same time triumphant life of Christ and that of his apostle !

God has conceded two sights to a man—
One, of men's whole work, time's completed plan;
The other of the minute's work, man's first
Step to the plan's completeness.

Both Christ and the apostles, like Abraham of old, had a sight of the 'completed plan'; but were content to die, having done their share in the 'minute's work.' And both found that 'minute's work' full of disappointment, and ended their lives of sacrifice to it at a dark moment, under circumstances of seeming despondency, but yet with a prophetic triumph which showed that their faith was as firm as ever in the permanence and ultimate victory of the work they had begun.

The sublime confidence of Christ in the ultimate triumph of his Divine moral mission had survived the bitter disappointment of his rejection by the Jews. It had cost him nights of sleepless 'watching unto prayer' to realise it. With tender thoughtfulness he had taken his disciples into the silence of the mountain, to break the sad prospect gradually to them. And although he then had come up to Jerusalem steadfastly contemplating and telling them of his coming death, yet the sight of Jerusalem had filled his eyes with tender tears. His last struggle with grief had been embittered by the betrayal of one disciple and the denial of another; and yet, through all, his moral conviction and purpose remained unshaken. The defencelessness of those whom he was sending out like sheep in the midst of wolves had not staggered him. They would no doubt be served as he had

been—scourged, imprisoned and killed—he knew all that, but the Gospel would be preached to all nations—the leaven would be effectually hid in the measures of meal—and it was a moral certainty that it would triumph in the end.

In the last picture we get of St. Paul the likeness to Christ's own experience is most strikingly visible. For here, too, no one can fail to recognise a human soul struggling with disappointment, and yet rising morally to a hope like Christ's, prophetic and triumphant in death.

Under the shadow of Nero's palace, in the squalid, crooked street, full of the rabble of Rome, there is a prisoner awaiting his trial, living in the meantime in a house hired for the purpose, with the Roman soldier to whom he is chained. This prisoner, soon to be crushed by Nero, will leave a more lasting mark upon the world than the tyrant. He is the minister of a kingdom that will overcome Nero's, and he knows it! When he stands alone before the lion he does not tremble. The sight of his chain reminds him 'that the Word of God is not bound.' And there, as he bows his head in weakness, broken down in health by many long years of imprisonment and by disease, his eyes perhaps bandaged and all but useless, while the lazy Roman soldier snores upon his couch, he dictates to his faithful scribe, Luke, the physician, who alone is with him now ('Demas hath forsaken me, only Luke is with me'), letters to the Churches, which will be received and obeyed far more and far longer than the decrees of Nero

and his Senate, and which rise to a higher key of perfect triumph and confidence than perhaps any other words written by human hand.

II

The Christianity and Mental Environments of Christians

HOWEVER different the future from that expected by Christ and St. Paul, it cannot be denied that their moral trust and confidence were more than justified by the event.

The Messianic expectation of the 'coming in the clouds' adhered still to the early Church as part of its mental environment. The tenacity with which it did so cannot be rightly understood unless its intimate connection be recognised, not only with the received cosmogony of the times, but also with current conceptions of human history.

At the Christian era men were supposed to be living in the time of the fourth kingdom of Daniel, whose destruction by fire was to usher in a new age—the everlasting kingdom of 'the Son of man coming in the clouds.'

Rome was supposed to be the fourth kingdom. Therefore the modern notion that the destruction of Jerusalem was the fulfilment of the prophecy of the advent of the Messiah had no place with the early Church.

To the early Christian Fathers the advent of Christ was still future, because Rome still remained, and the coming doom of Rome was announced by them again and again as certain therefore to come. But this conception of the millennial reign of the elect, which reduced heaven to a sort of Geneva under the saintly rule of Calvin, or what England might have been under the rule of the 'Fifth Monarchy men,' found no fulfilment in the coming of the Goths and Vandals. During the dark ages millennial hopes fell into the background, but, strange to say, after 1000 years they revived again, to form part of the mental environment of Protestantism, and to linger with other fragments of the old Jewish environment —such as Bibliolatry and Sabbatarianism—in various forms of puritan or millenarian doctrine even through the later decades of the nineteenth century, ecclesiastical Rome taking the place of civil Rome, as the beast or antichrist of the vision.

Slumbering Christians may be found even now who still cherish the hope of the 'coming in the clouds'—who have yet 'to awake and find it was a dream.'

But what of the reality?

The actual truth of things is always likely to be far grander than any human imagination substituted for it, and attempting to control it. Now, after eighteen centuries, we may recognise that the long-cherished vision of a royal road to the realisation of the kingdom of God upon earth

was not half so grand or so consistent with the eternal course of things, revealed by modern science, as the gradual growth of the little seed sown by Christ, the struggle of the tender plant among the briars and thorns of Judaism and the Roman world—the working of the leaven still going on at this day, leavening the lump.

The real difficulties of human life had in fact to be grappled with patiently age after age. Christianity had to win the battle in fair fight, by its intrinsic power, and there was no evading the stages and phases—the blade and the ear—through which Christ had foretold that the 'corn in the ear' was alone to be produced.

The popular love of marvel and miracle was no doubt fed and propitiated by the theory that the success of Christianity was secured by miraculous means. But Dante, 600 years ago, with far deeper insight, took higher ground when he claimed its natural success without the aid of miracle as evidence of its inherent power, and therefore of its truth.

> Were the world to Christianity converted,
> I said, *withouten miracles*, this one
> Is such, the rest are not its hundredth part;
> Because that, poor and fasting, thou didst enter
> Into the field, to sow there the good plant
> Which was a vine and has become a thorn!

The recognition of the real nature of the struggle with successive mental and theological environments, as well as with the evil of the outside world, adds in truth to the history of

Christianity something of that peculiar winning interest and pathos which the recognition of Christ's own subjection to his Jewish environment has been seen to give to his life. For it is evident that Christianity, like its Founder, had, in fact, to conquer by sacrifice—to triumph over evil by bearing its reproach—to grapple so closely with it that it oftentimes seemed to be merged in it. Again and again—nay, may it not be said *throughout*?—the leaven is lost sight of—'*hid*'—in the 'measures of meal.'

It had to struggle with other environments than that of millenarian dreams—and perhaps the most painful and cramping of all were its ecclesiastical environments.

Before many generations were passed, Christian conceptions of the Eternal Goodness were to all outward appearance swamped in metaphysical contentions about such questions as the relation of Christ's person to the Divine, and of the Divine and Human natures in Christ to each other—orthodoxy as to which is without moral effect, because metaphysical conceptions like these evoke no moral emotions in the human heart—until, instead of brotherly love, there was ghastly strife even to blood; and creeds were hardened, and mental gyves and fetters fastened on the Churches, which became the outside badges of a Christianity as far removed morally from the real Christianity of Christ as the savage morality of a hyper-orthodox Church like that of Abyssinia and the

narrow spirit of rigid Calvinistic sects are from the purity and gentleness, and the all-embracing breadth and freedom of Christ's love for men.

Again,—strange sensuous conceptions of a divided Deity, and of a celestial hierarchy of saints, combined with the abuse of symbols and images in Christian worship, landed the Churches in religious rites and practices so sensuous, and so near to old forms of heathen idolatry, that when the reaction came Christianity had to give way before even the religion of Mahomet,—a faith so ignorant of the course of history that it treated Moses and Christ as almost contemporary prophets, and jumbled together Christianity and Judaism, with other Eastern elements, in so strange a mixture that, as a new religion, it was essentially in itself unworthy of human acceptation. Even propagated by the sword it could never have prevailed so widely had it not been made unnaturally powerful by the contrast of its spiritual worship and iconoclastic zeal to the semi-idolatry and formal ritual of the Christianity of the day. It was thus that the great religious kingdom of Islam was carved out of Christendom, and Christianity itself held up to the scorn of millions in Asia and Africa, amongst whose ancestors Christian churches had once been founded and flourished.

Still further,—the narrow, selfish element in human nature could not but contribute its part to mar the moral work of Christianity. Whatever excuses may be made for the origin and long-

continued tenacity of sacerdotal and Augustinian theories of Christian dogma, it must be admitted that both of them have involved the imputation to the Divine Goodness of a wretchedly low standard of moral action. The Divine Goodness, in the first case, is represented as consenting to the intervention between itself and man of an ecclesiastical hierarchy or clergy—a ruling, priestly, and patrician caste (so familiar and natural an idea to the Roman mind) keeping possession of the gates and keys of the kingdom of God, entering themselves alone into its temple, admitting a comparatively small number of suppliants to its outer courts, whilst complacently contemplating the far greater number of mankind as shut out for ever in eternal torment and despair. Equally degrading was the other theory, which represented the kingdom of God as a mock republic of the type of Athens or Rome—a little, petty republic of elect citizens for whose sake the whole universe was ruled, as though it was right and natural that there should be an unenfranchised and reprobate world outside. Realise, if possible, the shame and indignity ! Christianity made answerable for all this human assumption and intolerance !

But enough ! Admit this, and more than this, and what force is added to the fact that in spite of all these antichristian elements associated with Christianity, as parts of its mental environment, imputed to it, and the reproach of which must, as it were, be carried in its bosom, as well as in spite of the evil, and lust, and anarchy of the

outside world, the succession of torch-bearers of moral truth was maintained through the Christian centuries.

The fact is clear that, under all these successive theological environments, in every age, and under all varieties of circumstances, men and women still lived whose *self* was absorbed and sunk in the work of promoting the moral good of mankind, whose pure love of their fellows was shown to be as deep and true as that of the old Hebrew prophets and saints, whilst it was crowned with Christian graces, such as *pre*-Christian characters could not show—men and women whose tenderness for poor suffering humanity can only be described as 'Christ-like,' and was all the more striking because of the hard cruelty of the barbarous ages in which many of them lived—men and women whose human affections, intensified by Christian faith, were enlisted in the service of high Christian duty, till, though often despised, and rejected by their own generation, they became centres of moral force and Christian civilisation, and as such must be recognised by History to be true links in the chain of moral evolution. It must not be forgotten that these known instances were but types of the way in which in numberless other unknown hearts the same love burned. They were proofs that in multitudes more of their class the leaven was at work. The experience of modern times must teach us this. For, whenever a Christian character rises into prominence in a Christian Church, no one dreams that its prominence adds

to its saintliness. In the silence and privacy of a humbler sphere, other lives are known to be led not one whit less holy or Christ-like. And for every one of these there are many more struggling with evil in every stage of saintship. Even general society becomes more or less unconsciously leavened by the presence of human goodness in its midst.

III

Christianity seen Working in the Development of Individual Moral Character

No Church, or sect, or class, or country, or age, has had a monopoly of these saintly souls. No ecclesiastical systems or creeds have been able to confine their love within the artificial bounds supposed to be the limits of the Divine benevolence. As the spirit of Christ rose morally out of Judaism, so in degree the spirits of these rose again and again into a higher moral atmosphere than that of their ecclesiastical environments. They mentally accepted creeds too narrow for their hearts, and which their Christian love evaded. However illogically, their love extended to the unbaptised and the non-elect, who according to their creeds were no favourites of heaven. Nay, to take an extreme instance, strange as it may seem, even the very office of *Inquisitor* forced by ecclesiastical authority or a harsh creed upon a Christian man, however much it may have jarred with his true

Christian instincts, has sometimes, let it be candidly admitted, not been able to stain all his holiness or to extinguish all his Christian love. Even in the *fanatic*, sad a phenomenon as such a combination must always be, there is often Christian love visibly struggling with un-Christian harshness and hardness of heart and creed.

So that, whilst admitting fully that the narrowness and inhumanity of Christian creeds have to answer for a terrible catalogue of inhuman and barbarous acts perpetrated in the name of the Christian religion, and leaving scars upon the brow of the Christian Churches which they can never wipe off, it must be admitted that Christianity has dwelt in them all. And, like its Founder, it may willingly bear the reproach of close contact with evil, because it is the contact of the leaven with the lump in which it is working. That the leaven is found in lumps of all stages of corruption and impurity, and that as yet no Christian Church can claim to be a lump completely leavened, is only another proof that the leaven is doing its work but that its work is not yet done.

And what is the leaven that has thus been working? Is it merely the natural domestic and social instincts of mankind struggling against the narrowness of creeds and the selfishness even of saints?

The phenomenon has already been noticed in Greek religious experience of these higher instincts of the human heart rising up and defying a false mythology. So in Christian history they may

well have proved stronger, because they are nearer to the eternal moral order of the universe, than the instincts called forth by imperfect Christian creeds. But historically they do not solely and alone account for the noble devotion to the moral good of men in Christian souls. The human nature, towards which Christian love extended, was not in itself lovable *enough* to call it forth. It was, as a matter of fact which cannot be doubted, called forth, like the love of Christ, by the sense of the *Divine goodness*. These Christians like Christ first loved God, and their love of Him was what called forth their love of men, in spite of all the unlovable traits and the evil they saw in them.

And so also it was their love of the Divine goodness, and not mere natural benevolent feelings towards men, which was the power producing holiness in the hidden life of their souls. For surely it is clear as the day that, but for those yearnings towards that higher goodness and constant turning of their hearts towards it in prayer which are embodied in Christian hymns and evidenced by every Christian biography, their own efforts to grapple with the evil in their own hearts would have failed, and sunk exhausted for want of an impulse high enough to keep alive the conflict.

Take away the belief in Divine goodness and sympathy with men from the hearts of these holy Christians, and they would have ceased to be the centres of moral force they were.

Nor is the point of this fact in the least degree

blunted by the further fact, startling as at first sight it may seem, that for long centuries, and in by far the largest of the Christian Churches to this day, the faith of Christians has not been and is not always turned directly towards the Divine goodness itself, or even the goodness of Christ, but often towards a supposed goodness in the 'Holy Virgin,' or the particular patron saint ignorantly believed to be the embodiment of the Divine goodness to the particular worshipper. And yet (to deny it would be idle) the same moral results, the same personal holiness and devotion to the moral good of men, are witnessed, in degree at least, as have been described as flowing from a pure and more direct faith in the Divine goodness itself. And why should it not be so? A form of heresy which interposes the smoked glass of saint-worship, or a mediatorial and sacerdotal system, may, in some cases at least, allow even more rays of the Divine goodness to pass into the heart of humble though superstitious worshippers, than in other cases another form of heresy may do which interposes the distorting lens of a theological dogma between the Divine goodness and hardly less superstitious believers in their own personal election from a reprobate multitude.

Christianity has in fact shown its power to shine through *all* forms of theological dogma—through all kinds of theological environments. In other words, whatever rays of the Divine goodness are allowed by them to pass into human souls as a matter of fact assert their power. Wherever, and

through whatever medium—whether Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, or any other creed—the Divine goodness is brought really home to the human heart, it is capable of producing that holiness of character and that love of men which by their moral force contribute to the moral advancement of mankind.

IV

Christianity seen Working in the Development of Social and Political Life

TURNING now to the great moral results of Christian civilisation as regards social and political life, it is believed that a careful enquiry would establish the fact that they also are not the results simply of the domestic and social instincts of mankind, called forth by the mere contact of man with man, and of class with class, and nation with nation, acting alone ; but of these with a moral force superadded to them by Christianity ; and, further, that this added force has simply sprung from the same recognition of the Divine moral goodness which has been seen to be the highest motive power in individual life.

If the line taken in this essay be not altogether astray the course of social development has certainly, as stated in an earlier chapter, been a *moral* one, rising out of the family and the domestic instincts of mankind. Christianity, as already

pointed out, seized upon these domestic instincts as the true guides for men faithfully to follow. It identified their exercise, when extended to the Divine goodness, with true religion. Its very conception of the Divine goodness was through the symbol of a 'Divine Fatherhood.' Its description of the relation of Christ and of men to the Divine Father was expressed in terms of 'sonship.' The relation of Christ to Christians and to the Church was declared to be a 'fraternal' and a 'bridal' one. Parents were commanded to love their children, and children religiously to honour and love their parents. Husbands were told religiously to love their wives. And even the relation of the master and the domestic slave was to be hallowed by the thought of the common bond of service of all the family on earth to the Master in heaven. In other words, Christianity set its seal of sanctity and added its religious sanction to the domestic instincts.

It was natural, therefore, that Christianity should historically flourish most amongst the races whose domestic affections were the strongest and because of their strength. And, undoubtedly, Christianity by doing so added to their strength. When the Saxons became Christians they had to change their modes of warfare, and to find a place for conquered tribes in their polity instead of exterminating them. A study of the laws of the Saxons after their acceptance of Christianity would also give proof at once of the strength and earnestness of the added sanction given by

Christianity to domestic chastity and virtue, and of the need there was for it.

Nor should anyone be misled by the trial and failure of the ecclesiastical experiment of celibacy. He would be a blind critic who either should charge the great fault and blunder of celibacy upon the Christianity of Christ, or fail to see that in spite of that blunder the high standard of domestic virtue which is the basis of the social fabric of Christian civilisation, is in a very high degree a contribution of Christianity to the moral advancement of mankind.

Again, if the political basis of society at the time of the birth of Christianity be compared with that which is now the already-established basis of the most advanced Christian countries, and towards the realisation of which modern civilisation seems to be rapidly tending, the difference must be recognised as the realisation of a Christian ideal towards the attainment of which Christianity has also contributed the main moral force.

It has before been noticed that the highest civilisation of the old world, whether Semitic or Aryan, assumed the basis of slavery, and the necessary presence of a large unenfranchised class. It was the same among the Teutonic nations which overran Europe. It has before been noticed also that the leaven of Christianity began to work in the first Christian generation. Within the Church there could be no distinction between bond and free, because according to Christ there was no distinction between them in the love of God. In

the monastery the same levelling process went on. When the serfs of Germany burst out again and again into open rebellion against their feudal and ecclesiastical oppressors, the motto on their banner of the 'Bundschuh' was 'The Divine Justice.' And in our own times the fight against slavery, whether in English colonies or in the United States, really has sprung from the root of Christian faith in the Divine goodness to all men alike.

It is believed also that careful historical study would show that the great democratic movement of modern times is to a very large extent—to an extent not always sufficiently recognised—a product of the Christian conviction that the Divine goodness extends to the poor as well as to the rich. It has inherited, indeed, something, but not everything, from the example of republican experiments of classical and mediæval times. And, if the democratic movement in the crisis of the French Revolution took an externally antichristian direction as regards dogma and creed, it still would be hard to extrude it altogether from connection with Christian aims and convictions. Its roots lay in the soil of Christian civilisation, and, like Islam, its revulsion from Christianity was a revulsion not from the Christianity of Christ, but from the terrible parodies and perversions of it by the French Church and State of the eighteenth century, which in that case were the carcases round which the eagles gathered. It was in fact in the assertion of human right and justice, the sense of which Christianity had derived from its conscious-

ness of the Divine goodness and made current coin, that the strength lay of its rebellion against theological and political creeds and systems which had hitherto called themselves Christian. And, wild as the reaction seemed at the time, history may yet prove that its rejection of Christianity was but a temporary rebound of the free human soul, leaping forward into a new future, when suddenly freed from the unchristian tyrannies of the past.

In truth the great democratic movement, of which the French Revolution was an episode, had clearly begun centuries earlier. The Protestant Revolution, the Revolt of the Netherlands, the rise of the great American Republic and its successful War of Independence, the abolition of serfdom and the commencement of universal education in Germany, were also episodes in the same great drama ; and so have been the struggle of Italy for freedom, and the enfranchisement and education of the English working classes.

Looking at all these broadly, they are ripples and waves in a great tide which is moving onwards towards the political development of mankind. And not only is the direction of the movement, taken as a whole, evidently towards the realisation of the goal and object of Christian civilisation, but Christianity itself has mainly furnished the moral force by which it has been so far accomplished.

V

Legitimacy of the Moral Evidence of Christian Experience

WITHOUT dwelling further on details, which would expand this essay into a treatise, the foregoing considerations would seem to show that a survey of the facts of Christian experience for sixty generations would prove conclusively two things :—

1. That faith in the Divine goodness has historically been the main moral force, producing not only individual holiness of life, but, more broadly considered, also that moral development of social and political life which is described by the term, Christian Civilisation.
2. That Christians generally throughout all these generations, and particularly those Christians who belonged to the succession of torch-bearers, by whose faith the faith of others was kept alive, were by their individual religious experience convinced of the reality of that Divine goodness. They were men who fed their religious life by habitually turning their hearts towards the Divine goodness according to the command of Christ, and they owed to this practice of 'Christian prayer' and moral communion with the Divine goodness, that moral strength and goodness which was shown openly in their lives.

Now those yearnings of human souls in Christian no less than in pre-Christian times (respecting the prophetic character, as well as the identity of which the expression of them in Hebrew Psalms and Christian hymns, extending over 3000 years, leaves no doubt), were yearnings directed either reasonably towards an objective reality which has justified their trust, or unreasonably towards a fiction or illusion so perfect a counterfeit of reality as to hold its own for 3000 years, and to produce the same moral results.

Scientific men say that such an organ as the eye is the result of accumulated structural changes, resulting from the constant play for ages of radiations of light from outside objects upon the nervous tissue of what thus by a long process of gradual development through countless generations has gradually become an eye. The reality of the outside objects and of the radiations from them is obviously necessary to the result.

Is there, then, no corresponding objective reality, playing a like part as regards that moral experience, by which the moral nature of man has plainly been developed ?

No scientific man will answer this question by an absolute denial.

But, then, it will no doubt be said that the objective reality is the eternal order and course of things, which religious men have anthropomorphically, and therefore unscientifically, pictured as a moral being with intelligence and moral feelings, but which, stripped of these anthropomor-

phic conceptions, is, philosophically considered, a *mere order* or *law* observed in the course of things. For that there is such an order and law in the course of things, visible to human intelligence in the Kosmos and in human history, modern science with its theories of evolution and development would be the last to deny.

But it is here modestly submitted that the charge of anthropomorphism fails when upon the legitimate evidence of the moral instincts and emotions of mankind, this order is found to be a *moral* order.

Man, a moral being, finding, in fact, something really in common with his own moral nature in the moral order of things, infers legitimately from the evidence of his own moral emotions the presence of moral goodness at work there. It is not anthropomorphic, therefore, in him to attribute moral goodness to the objective cause of the eternal moral order. Anthropomorphism begins when he imputes, as the creeds do, other human attributes outside the point of moral contact, or the line of the community or likeness which that contact discloses. And Christ at least was careful not to do this.

So that, cleared of this *à priori* objection—this unfair charge of anthropomorphism,—the question remains whether the experience of Christians was not in fact a strong verification of the Christian hypothesis of the reality of the Divine moral goodness.

For—

1. On the hypothesis of its *unreality* the fulfilment of the prophetic faith of Christ and Christians in it becomes a miracle of the old type—a miraculous prediction of an event which could not be known beforehand without miraculous foresight—while on the Christian hypothesis of its *reality* the foresight of Christ was a reasonable trust in an actual moral power or force recognised as already at work, and known to be intrinsically able to produce the moral result predicted. And,
2. Wholly apart from the question of prediction, on the hypothesis of the *unreality* of the Divine goodness, the religious life of sixty generations of Christians—the moral strength derived by them from Christian prayer, and moral communion with the Divine goodness, their love of unlovely human nature and noble self-sacrifice for the good of others, their heroic adherence to right through persecution, danger and death—all this Christian life has been fed and kept alive by an illusion ; while, on the hypothesis of the *reality* of the Divine goodness, the cause legitimately produced the effect in perfect harmony with the eternal order and course of things.

VI

The Illegitimacy of Sensuous Evidence for the Purpose in Hand

It will be observed that the evidence, to which attention has been called in the foregoing survey of the facts of Christian experience, has been carefully made to rest upon the general facts of sober religious life, and not at all on those abnormal phenomena which, because of their near approach to the miraculous, form perhaps the favourite ground of popular Christian belief.

That this course is a wise one probably a very few words will be enough to show.

No attempt has been made in this essay to prove the impossibility of miracles. Nor has their actual presence in history been denied. The presence of what is generally called miracles by Christians, both in the experience of Christ and his apostles, has been fully admitted. And reasons have been given why it is reasonable to suppose that a large number of them at all events really occurred. But it was shown that their occurrence in the experience of an excited multitude, at times of great religious movement and expectation, was natural, and that, therefore, even if some of them were in reality due to supernatural causes, it would be exceedingly difficult to sever them from those that were not so ; while, at the same time, both Christ and his apostles treated the craving for miracles with moral impatience and dislike, and

refused to build Christianity upon any foundation so precarious and morally barren as miracles would afford.

Whilst, therefore, it is perfectly clear that in Christian history miracles of the same type as some at least of those of the New Testament, and remarkable occurrences which up to our own times are classed by most Christians as miraculous, are on record as having occurred, probably in every century from the first to the nineteenth in which we live, it seemed to be wise, and more really consistent with the Christian spirit, not to lean any part of the weight of this argument upon them.

The experience of what in these days are commonly called religious 'Revivals' surely ought to confirm the wisdom of this course.

There are, no doubt, at such crises of religious history real causes and forces at work which bring them about. A natural predisposition to turn to religion seizes upon nations sometimes with a strong yearning for light and help. It comes sometimes as a reaction from a period of doubt, which has ended almost in impatient despair of truth, or from dissatisfaction with material explanations of the problems of life, or from the tired disappointment of a hollow, pleasure-seeking, and worldly life. We see these waves periodically swaying the multitude religiously, as we sometimes see similar waves swaying them politically. And it must be admitted that the underlying causes, whatever they be, give a real basis in fact, and to some extent in reason, to movements

which would otherwise seem to be wild gusts of unreasoning religious enthusiasm.

Yet, nevertheless, it would be a great mistake to seek in the abnormal mental and moral phenomena of these religious revivals for what may be called sensuous proof of moral realities. At such times Christians are often passing through a period of diseased and excited feeling—of, in fact, religious inebriation—and it would be as unwise to rest religious faith upon the mental aberrations experienced under such influences, as it was in old times to make the Pythoness drunk and then to regard her utterances as oracles. To fortify Christian faith against the inroads of doubt with stories of marvels and sudden conversions and strange coincidences which abound and grow into miracles under the influence of these storms of religious excitement, would in fact be as foolish as to attempt to build a breakwater with the bubbles which the surf casts upon the shore.

Christians who feed their religious life with the constant sipping of religious stimulants, until their talk becomes full of religious phraseology, and they speak of Christ as though he were 'a familiar spirit,' and everything which happens to them as a special Divine providence in their favour, and prayer as a sort of miraculous instrument for obtaining from heaven by a royal largess everything they want; who seem to think that Christian humility consists in ascribing to Divine inspiration everything clever they do or say—these 'fast' and sensuous religionists, however real at root their

piety may be, little know how many doubts and difficulties they throw in the way of sober Christian belief.

The careful enquirer will not be likely to accept the image of the Deity placed on the mercy-seat by this sensuous school of religionists. He will remember that Moses with deeper insight left it vacant for the Eternal goodness. He will remember also the fact, before alluded to, that Christ when he taught his disciples to pray, taught them to pray for the moral object in which even the old Hebrew prophets had been able to lose their own individual selfish interests—the promotion of the Divine moral kingdom upon earth—the deliverance of themselves and mankind from moral evil—the atonement of their own and the Divine will—and to expect an answer, not in sensuous impressions, or excited religious feelings, then and there in their closet, but, as already pointed out, in increased moral strength openly and in the daylight, to do the will they have prayed may be done. To all appearance it was so with Christ himself. His nights of prayer in the silence of the hills of Galilee, or in the quiet garden outside the noise of the city, received their reward openly in the moral power which enabled him in two short years of life and work to influence so mightily the moral fortunes of mankind.

Any attempt to substitute for the moral conception of the Divine Fatherhood anything more sensuous Christ does not seem himself to have made. That the Divine moral goodness is in

moral contact with man seems to be what he, like Moses, tried to impress upon the minds and hearts of men as all that is cognisable to man, or needful for him to know of the attributes of Deity. He never spoke of a closer vision of God than that moral one given to the 'pure in heart.'

For the present purpose, at all events, it is better to adhere to the strictly moral ground hitherto followed, and modestly to commend the sober realities of the religious experience of Christians since the Christian era to the consideration of the reader, as worthy even of the examination of scientific men, as amenable to scientific methods, and as at least in a remarkable degree apparently verifying the faith of Christ in the reality of the Divine Goodness and its influence upon the human heart.

PART V

RESULTS OF THE ENQUIRY

I

The Evidence of Religious Experience seems to Support Christianity but not its Theological Environments

THIS, then, seems to be the result of the enquiry.

Cautiously avoiding sensuous evidence of a kind likely to mislead, and relying alone on the sober moral realities of the long course of human experience covered by the foregoing survey, the facts seem to be :—

(1) That the religious faith of Christ Himself, and of those who preceded and succeeded him, was no mere product of an inference from a wide historical view of the moral result of the evolution of nature, or of the moral development of the human race as a whole ; but far more the result of an inference from facts in the *individual experience* of those by whom it was made.

(2) The religious experience of these holy men, and in a unique sense of Christ, resulted in a re-

markable likeness or unity of moral character—an identity of spirit—a continuity of moral endeavour running through them all—Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Messianic prophets, Christ, and Christians,—and

(3) All these alike bore witness that this spirit, this moral force within them, was not self-born, or spontaneously generated in their own breasts; but was a tone awakened, as it were, upon the chords of their moral instincts by a music, and, as they inferred also, by a *Musician* outside themselves, in response to whose notes their moral instincts thrilled, and thus in them, as in Arthur's knights,

> There flashed a likeness to the King!

And, recurring to the purpose of the survey and its place in the argument, these facts seem to unite themselves with, and to corroborate, those inferences drawn from a broad view of the whole course of evolution and development so far as known to man, to which reference was made at the outset of this enquiry, viz. that traces seem to be visible of a moral purpose, (1) in the production of a race of moral beings, and then (2) in their moral development—a moral purpose which seems to imply a moral agent or power working through the ages to produce these moral results. In other words, the facts of individual religious experience, to speak very modestly, do at least seem remarkably to confirm the hypothesis of the existence of such a moral being by

the evidence they seem to give of traces of his working, where surely it is natural to seek for it, viz. in the religious experience of holy men of all ages who have lived, as it were, in the main line of the moral development of the race, and who have been mainly instrumental in aiding its course.

So that the result of an enquiry based upon the full recognition of those modern scientific discoveries, which at first sight appear so antagonistic to Christian faith, seems to be to free Christianity from responsibility for its untenable and precarious theological adjuncts, and then to bring into prominence the fact that there exists a large body of evidence in support of the *real* Christian hypothesis of a kind admissible in a scientific and reasonable investigation, capable of being dealt with and tested by strictly scientific methods, and pointing to results apparently consistent with the whole course and order of the development of the Kosmos;—evidence of such weight and importance, that it cannot be legitimately met by merely metaphysical objections and the negations of *à priori* reasoning.

In other words, in place of a *dogmatic theology* calling itself Christianity, there is presented to view a *Christian hypothesis*, which, being itself an induction from facts, gains new life and reasonableness from the full recognition of those modern scientific difficulties which, whilst mortally wounding its theological environments, seem thus to leave untouched and unscathed Christianity itself.

This result may perhaps be all that could be expected from an essay which avowedly has aimed rather at the discovery of the existence and real nature of the evidence than at its full examination in detail, and at the discovery of the true methods of the solution of the great problem than at its complete and final solution.

But there are two questions which may fairly be asked in connection with the method here suggested of approaching the solution of the problem.

That method has rested on the careful distinction of what may be called ' vital or real Christianity ' from its successive theological and other mental environments. But as was stated at the outset of the enquiry, this real Christianity has never in actual fact been thus isolated ; it has always been combined with some mental environment ; and it may be asked :

(1) If the evidence here pointed out be good for the purpose of supporting the ' real Christianity '—the moral trust in a Divine Being of perfect moral goodness—may it not be made use of in support of the current Christianity of the creeds which has really done the work on which so much stress has been laid ; and so prove too much ? (2) Would the ' real Christianity ' have done its work any better than the ' current Christianity ' of the creeds has done ? Nay, is it likely that if it were to become the religion of the future it would show itself to be the same moral power in

the world henceforth as the Christianity of the creeds has undoubtedly been in the past?

In reply to the first question it is enough to say that it must have been recognised throughout the foregoing survey of Jewish and Christian religious experience that the whole force of facts has turned against the claim of the successive mental and theological environments to be considered as any vital or real part of Christianity. They have been transient and shifting from age to age. They have been the subjects often of grave diversity of opinion, and they have given rise to divisions and strife among Christians in almost every generation since the Christian era. They have one after another been mortally wounded and passed away, but Christianity has not died! And, moreover, that which is vital and real in Christianity has exerted its moral power, in spite of all these diversities, in the hearts of Christians of various and hostile theological parties and churches. And, further, the common foundation of all these theological environments—viz. the mistaken view inherited from Judaism, of the character of the inspiration and therefore of the authority of the Scriptures—has been seen to crumble under them all alike! Lastly, evidence has been traced of the independence of Christ's own Christianity, even of his *own* environment—how morally it rose, high and self-poised out of and above the environment, and so was able to survive its decay. And if any further evidence were needed, it surely might be given in the words of

St. Paul. 'No words have so often been made the battle-ground of theological strife as his. Half theology to this day rests upon the supposed infallible authority of texts from his epistles. But what was his own attitude to his *own* theology? *He did not regard it in all its details as an essential part of Christianity.* 'Though I should understand all mysteries and all knowledge [theology must be included in this], and have not charity, I am nothing!' It was the moral essence itself and not its mental environments which was the essential and eternal thing. He was conscious that 'prophecies' should fail, and that 'knowledge' must 'pass away,' while 'charity never faileth.' He clearly saw and honestly declared the fallibility of his theological views as well as of his prophecies of the future. He was not ashamed to admit 'that he saw but as through a glass darkly,' that 'he knew in part,' and so 'prophesied only in part,' just as 'when he was a child he thought and spake as a child'; and he made no secret of his readiness, nay eagerness, to put aside his provisional theological views of things when he should see things as they really are, just as he 'put away childish things' when he became a man!

This is the answer to the first question.

And now, in answer to the second, it may be urged with equal confidence and without much fear of contradiction, that were Christianity to rise today out of all its decaying theological environments and, shaking itself loose from their trammels, to go forth once more to the world preaching Christ's

Gospel of the Divine moral goodness, pure and simple and nothing else, there is every reason to believe that it would prove itself intrinsically as powerful as ever, both to work the moral regeneration of individuals and to carry on the moral development of the race socially and politically, and to do these with a success perhaps not known since the days of its founder.

> If a star were confined into a tomb,
> Its captive light must needs burn there;
> But when the hand that shut her up gave room,
> She'd shine through all the sphere.

Unless in the whole course of the foregoing survey of the religious experience of the past three thousand years our footsteps have strangely wandered from the true lines of fact, the reason why the light of Christianity has shone and now shines so dimly is no fault of its own. It is rather the fault of the theological and ecclesiastical tombs and chains in which its captive light has been confined.

Who could expect what sparks of Christian light might struggle through either an Augustinian or a Sacerdotal theology to be able to kindle any more love of the Divine goodness in human hearts than they have done? The day is past, surely, when men can be expected to be won over to love as 'goodness' what in plainer speech is but another name for pitiless injustice and gross partiality. Such goodness is not to be trusted, and when its true character is realised, it can evoke no love. Man's moral nature thrills with other emotions

than those of love in its presence. And were such gospels to be preached much longer as the religion of modern civilisation, the same phenomena as were produced in Greece would probably be produced again. Human justice would be upheld by the Euripides of modern life as rightly binding on the conscience whatever gods might be and say, and the cry would rise in our world too :—

> There are no gods ! no gods !
> Glory to God who saves Euripides !

This is indeed the risk that the present generation is running, because the theological environments of Christianity do not fall off from her fast enough. But strip her of her grave-clothes, and put her pure Gospel into her mouth, and there are no tidings which could be told to the wearied and heavy-laden multitude to-day which would be hailed as half so glad. No tidings could be told which at the same time would so reinforce the moral power of goodness amongst men, or which would so lead on in triumph the moral development of the race, as the tidings (*if men could be assured of their truth*) that behind the veil of the mysteries of human life there ever has been, and there is, an eternal moral power perfect in moral goodness, more perfect than theologians have ever yet been able to define, or than Christians have ever yet dared to hope for, in whose gracious ' loving kindness ' therefore men may have perfect trust.

No hostile critic of Christianity will be likely

to dispute this. If it be disputed at all, it will be by the comfortable children of existing creeds, and if these in the first burst of impatience should complain that what would be left of Christian truth after admitting the decaying and unsubstantial and changing character of its mental and theological environments, is but a mean residue, not worth preserving, incapable of giving rest to the human soul and satisfying its needs, it may be fair to remind them that theologians have again and again said the self-same thing, from the days of St. Augustine to our own, and yet after a while they or their successors have accommodated themselves to the inexorable logic of facts, and swum again with the stream. And if like an ancient apostle they may be tempted to redouble assertion on the eve of denial, let them ponder the following points.

Along with the environment of speculative theology which they hold so dear there would have passed away the bugbears and the nightmares which have so often and so cruelly haunted the souls of Christians.

If the Augustinian scheme of Redemption from the wrath of God is seen to crumble as all men's inventions do, the soul which used to be satisfied with a sense of personal salvation is not therefore left to the wrath from which he had hoped by a special personal election to be saved. The *nightmare itself* is gone. If the Christianity of Christ be true he and all men are left in the hands of a moral goodness worthy of their trust.

If all certainty on theological dogmas is gone, and there is no longer any infallible standard of speculative truth to which appeal can be made, the nightmare of condemnation for theological heresy or error is gone too. No longer need any Christian shudder at the fate of Papists or Unitarians or Jews or heathen, or fear he may himself be excluded from heaven because of the incorrectness of his theological views.

If the Bible can no longer be regarded as a magic book of Divine authorship, and as made up of texts of equal authority from whencesoever taken, and to be used as it is said the Romans used to use their 'Virgils,' it follows that it must no longer be submitted to those 'private interpretations' which have so often been made to sanction the sins of saints. But its better use remains. The more its real nature is understood, the more will its witness to the unity of the religious experience of holy men of all ages be valued by Christians; and as they seek its pages in order to put themselves into the closest possible contact with these and with Christ and the eternal righteousness, the more will that contact kindle in their hearts a like holy spirit, just as personal contact with the heart of one that is holy is far more powerful in its moral influence than any amount of speculative teaching.

If other cherished dogmas are gone, and much around which even the poetry of Christian life had wreathed itself is found to be a dream and has vanished along with the nightmares of religion, faith is more completely thrown upon the Divine

moral goodness, which brought home to the human heart by Christ (as by no other) is that which always has been and is now able to awaken a response in human hearts, so that Christians can and do rise into moral harmony with it, and catching the same spirit, find their highest happiness in working with God and Christ for those very ends for which the Christian religion has all along striven, and to attain which it is apparently the only adequate means, viz. the raising of each individual man to the highest moral perfection and the realisation of the highest type of social and national life for mankind.

And if there be not personal gain and reward enough in the privilege of service and in the faith that life is not lonely but lit up as it were by the sense of a Divine moral sympathy and fellowship in work, need the Christian ask for any higher or more sure or real heaven at last, than that involved in the faith and trust of Christ, when on the Cross he committed his spirit into the hands of Him whom he delighted to call 'his Father'? If he be now even in still closer union and sympathy with the Divine moral goodness than when upon earth, according to his own expectation and the Apostles' faith, surely no surer or clearer or more definite and real heaven could be conceived of for Christians than that involved in their committing their spirits when they die into the same Eternal and 'Fatherly' hands into which he committed his!

And even as regards the morally evil in this

life (and who is not embraced in this class?), whilst this view of the *moral* aim and character of Christianity is not likely to lessen the sense of the depth or wretchedness of sin and evil, does not a dawn of hope rise even upon *their* lot, when the wonderful result of the great work of the evolution of nature and the development of man is realised; viz. the production of a moral being whose moral emotions are capable of responding to moral goodness when brought really home to them? What human soul, save the soul of Christ, has ever yet in this life been brought into actual contact with perfect moral goodness, and felt the full force of its power? And if it be so, who shall dare to deny the power of perfect moral goodness, if, the veil of this mortal life being withdrawn, it shall be seen face to face as it really is, to transform even the darkest soul into its likeness, according to the apostle's hope as he looked forward to the day 'when he should be like Him because he should see Him as He is.'

What Christian would not be content with such a Gospel? and who having embraced it would wish again to enwrap the high hope inspired by it in the environment of a complicated speculative theology, knowing, as he surely must do, that any environment it might make for itself now would but prove as all others which had preceded it, a temporary clothing for moral truth which in its turn must inevitably decay and vanish?

What Christian, on the other hand, realising the preciousness of the moral truth of such a Gospel,

and believing it to be both independent of, and intrinsically powerful enough to survive all theological environments, would consciously let his aversion for the theological environment of his fellow-Christian's faith hinder that fellowship which the possession by both of the 'pearl of great price'—the common possession of a faith in the Divine goodness and sympathy—ought surely to produce? His purified faith would be of little service if it did not make it easy for him to exercise towards others of narrower and as he may think of grosser creeds a wider charity than he could reasonably expect them to exercise towards himself.

II

CONCLUSION

The Practical Difficulties in the Way of Christian Faith not Necessarily Insurmountable

THE writer of these pages is deeply impressed with the incompleteness and inadequacy of the treatment which so momentous a question as the one under consideration must receive in an essay so brief, and at the same time covering so much ground as this.

He is conscious, too, of the unwisdom there would be in exaggerating in anywise the conclusions arrived at or suggested as likely to be reached after further enquiry.

On one point, however, the result seems to him to be clear and certain.

Recurring to the difficulties in the way of Christian faith stated, and certainly with no attempt to minimise them, in the opening section, there seems, when they are fairly faced, to be no one difficulty amongst them half so great as the *moral* difficulties of that sacerdotal theology which, wrapping up Christianity in its terrible environment, drives religion into the convent, and leaves the world outside a prey to superstition and atheism ; and no difficulty amongst them half so great, so hard to face, as the *moral* difficulties involved in that Augustinian system of theological dogma which, in more modern times, has passed under the name of 'Evangelical Christianity.' And it is precisely these moral difficulties which have vanished as the attempt has been made to estimate the bearing upon Christian faith of the difficulties raised by modern scientific thought. They have vanished because the theologies which produced them have themselves turned out to be no true part of Christianity.

The real difficulties which remain after such an enquiry as this, and which rise up before the mind when at the end of it the question is again asked, 'Will Christianity die ?' are two—one of them important rather because of the immense patience it involves and demands from human nature than from any inherent hopelessness in the thing itself—the other of them important because it is itself of the very essence and core of the question.

A few remarks upon these two difficulties will conclude this essay.

The first of them is simply this :—whether in human nature, and especially in Christians, there be a fund of patience and temper deep enough to carry through the delicate task of gradually but firmly stripping the Christianity of the Churches of all that is mortal in its environments until it becomes once more for this age and future ages essentially at one again with the Christianity of Christ. Or if it should be so that the Christian Churches of our day, like the Jewish Church of the Christian Era, refuse to submit to this humbling process, then whether there be in human nature patience and temper enough to bear without terrible revolutions and a general breaking up of the very bonds of society, the process, still more humiliating to the Churches, of the rise independently of them, and it may be out of their ruins, of the new life into which it may be needful for Christianity to develope itself. Will Christian life itself bear, without breaking under the strain, the wrench from old moorings and the launch out into the deep without the old beacons and the old pilots and the old charts, trusting to faith in the Divine perfect moral goodness as its only compass ?

This is not a prospect without hope, because it is not an untried path. It is not the first time that such a process has been in some measure passed through. It is not the first time that Christian faith has had to bear, and has been able to survive, the ' refining fire ' and the ' winnowing fan.' And

the time must surely come when the recognition of Christ's own attitude towards a crumbling mental environment will, with the added pathos and sense of sympathy thrown by it over his life, give to Christians the sustaining sense that they are but treading in his footsteps and following his example, in surrendering the letter of the old faiths to fulfil the spirit, in throwing the full weight of their trust upon the Divine moral goodness and upon that alone. And the time must also come when, instead of building precarious theologies upon St. Paul's arguments, in which he so impatiently meets Jewish cavils with Jewish weapons, Christians will turn, as he so often turned at the end of his arguments, with moral relief to those moral conclusions which reflect so truly the spirit of the 'Sermon on the Mount,' in order to catch somewhat of that modest and reasonable spirit which he had caught from his Master, and which made him so ready to acknowledge how provisional and precarious—nay, even how 'childish,' as compared with the realities they aimed at—must of necessity be the best theological views even of an apostle like himself! Such a confession by an apostle may perhaps some day be felt to be worth more for comfort and strengthening of faith to Christians as they tread the new paths, than all the hard theological sayings of which so much more has been made hitherto, and which have so often been wrested during eighteen centuries into support of error.

In the meantime is it too much to ask even

from the comfortable children of the present creeds that they should admit that at least a case has been made out for an honest enquiry on their part, whether in following the letter of the old creeds they may not be leaving unfulfilled the spirit of Him whose name they bear and of those whose apostolic authority they plead ?

The other difficulty is one far greater, and perhaps needing more patience and temper still.

It is the alleged *want of evidence*—i.e. of such evidence as is required by scientific minds—of the reality of *that, belief in which* (they will readily admit) has been so potent a factor in the moral development of the human race.

Why should the scientific man be asked to believe in that which does not come within his sphere and cannot make itself amenable to his material tests ? This is the real difficulty which Science starts in the way of Christian faith.

The practical reply here made to this reasoning of scientific men is simply and modestly the following :—

The legitimate range of science cannot properly be narrowed simply within the sphere of matter and its laws—of molecules and molecular forces. In whatever sphere of knowledge its *methods* are available, there it is bound to go. It may not legitimately close its eyes to whatever *moral* as well as physical facts are brought within its cognisance. It has been shown that the evidence of the *moral* emotions is as scientifically

legitimate, so far as it goes, as to the *moral* qualities of *moral* agents or actions as the evidence of other sensations is of those other qualities of outward objects to which they correspond. Therefore, it has been urged, the presence or absence of a higher moral goodness than human in the evolution of the universe towards a moral end, in the moral development of the moral being so produced and in the individual religious experience of the holiest men in continuous succession for three or four thousand years past, and emphatically in the experience of Christ, is not necessarily the subject of a barren enquiry. An attempt has been made to point out where the main evidence is to be found, and wherein lie its most remarkable characteristics. And it is again urged that the question is one of *evidence* demanding careful enquiry on the part of scientific minds, and not a mere question to be settled off-hand on *à priori* considerations. If it were indeed so that the Christian hypothesis must stand or fall with Augustinian or Sacerdotal theologies, then indeed possibly an enquiry might be rendered useless by a foregone conclusion. But seeing that these theological environments of Christianity are no more a part of Christianity than the epicycles of the astrologers were a part of the solar system, and seeing that the Christianity of Christ has far more natural affinity and correspondence with modern scientific theories of evolution than with mediæval theological theories, it is otherwise. It is suggested therefore that at least a case is made out for suspended judgment

and careful enquiry on the part of the scientific philosopher.

And as to the result ? If a popular high priest of science, after a lifetime devoted to physical science almost exclusively, in his moments of highest insight finds no solution of the problem of the Kosmos in material atheism, but rather is driven irresistibly to question with himself whether it can possibly be that there exists in the universe no higher knowledge of its mysteries than his own ; what will be the response of an equally scientific mind after a lifetime's equally faithful study, with equal wealth of scientific resource, devoted to the facts of the religious experience, and of the moral development of mankind ? Will such a mind be any *more* likely to find in material atheism a solution of the moral problems of human life ?

Unless this question can be answered in the affirmative, the true attitude of science to Christianity is surely one at least of tentative regard and earnest respect, and by no means one of hasty denial or covert hostility.

Lastly, whilst theologians and scientific men—the priests of theology and the priests of science—are pursuing their respective enquiries (and it must be confessed that the end of them is not yet ; perhaps not for generations), the practical question remains, what attitude towards Christianity ought to be taken by the far larger class of laymen who have to act in actual life as it is, and to deal with social and political questions as they come to hand ?

Surely the wise man's attitude ought not to be one of self-deception, but one of truth and honesty to himself and to others.

The precariousness of modern theology ought surely to be frankly acknowledged, and even if there be some things about Christianity itself which in this age of transition are really open to reasonable doubt, no good can come from concealment of the truth that it is so. It would be moral cowardice either to ignore or to evade the fact of uncertainty by taking refuge under the sacerdotal authority of the priests of either theology or science.

The fact seems to be that neither the creed of ecclesiastical authority, nor the denial of the truth of Christianity altogether by the Materialist, nor even the dogmatic agnosticism which, perhaps, is the most tempting theory of all, have a sound logical foundation in the facts of human life and history.

Unless the line of argument taken in this essay be altogether mistaken and astray, the Christian hypothesis of the presence in human history of a moral force or power, morally influencing individual men and working through the ages for the moral development of mankind, is far nearer to the truth of things. And if of this moral force Christianity has struck the true key-note, it surely may reasonably claim at least *moral* acceptance.

There may be much else, not resting so directly on moral discernment as upon intellectual inference, which, to speak plainly, appears to have

only a preponderance of probabilities in its favour. And with respect to this the true attitude seems to be that of provisional faith, or at least high hope.

Inspired by this hope and sustained by this faith, the course of true wisdom must surely be to embrace those high moral aims which are undoubtedly right and true, and in the faithful pursuit of which, age after age, the faith in things unseen, and the hope for things yet to be, seem to have been kindled.

Those just moral aims of Christianity are beyond doubt true to the life of things, and as true now as they ever were. And therefore, beyond doubt, Christianity cannot die! It has still a great work before it which nothing else can do. Its pure spirit was never more needed in individual life. Its high moral aim to solve the great social and political problems of human life upon the basis of the golden rule, and so as to result in making human society a true commonwealth, never was so much in harmony with the spirit of any age as it is of this. The great tide of democracy is irresistibly rolling on, and there are rocks ahead. Nowhere else in this world than in these Teutonic Christian nations, and in no other age of history than in this, has any political experiment been openly grappled with so vast and so important as that the trial of which is coming on with such rapid strides in Western Christendom. It involves no less than the full acknowledgement of the political brotherhood of all classes in a nation, and

the avowed endeavour to bring home to the lowest depths of society those blessings of civilisation which Christianity claims to be by right the common inheritance of all men.

This is surely not a time for wise men to scout and discard Christianity as a worn-out faith or as a matter of indifference. Nor is it a time for them to hide their heads under the enervating shadow of priesthoods and churches, or to nurse their own selfish saintship in little self-satisfied sects despairing of the world till ' the millennium ' comes. This is not a time to drown doubts and misgivings by making the pursuit of pleasure the absorbing business of life, or by taking the analogous course of indulging in a sensuous religious life—in a round of endless religious excitements —which is far more likely to end in spiritual paralysis than in an improved moral health and power to work.

It is surely a time when it is more than ever needful that wise men should be sober and keep their heads clear from delusions, when it behoves them to stand loyally by that in Christianity which they know to be real and in the true lines of the eternal order and course of things, viz. its high moral aim, not alone even to raise individual moral character to its highest type—not alone to save one here and another there out of a mass of misery and wretchedness—but also to lift the masses of men on to a higher and higher moral level.

To rise into moral harmony with this high

moral aim, to find their highest happiness in hearty fellow-work with those who, from Abraham to Christ, and through the Christian centuries, have, in spite of bewildering mental environments, led on the moral advancement of mankind, is still a worthy endeavour and a reasonable service.

And for the rest—the Christian's faith and hope for the eternal future—is it anything new that the Christian's course on earth should be a work of faith as well as a labour of love? What if some parts of this faith and of these hopes fail, as St. Paul expected parts of *his* to fail, in literal fulfilment? Who would not rather that they did fail than that the eternal future should be limited by the dim and childish conceptions of ancient or modern human thoughts? Who would not rather find himself mistaken in some of these things in fellowship with Christ and the noblest men of the past, than, cutting himself off from that fellowship and ignoring what is real and true in the religious experience of 3000 years, find himself (to use Mr. Gladstone's apt illustration) drifting like Delos on the ocean of life without a rudder and without a goal?

AT THE BALLANTYNE PRESS
PRINTED BY SPOTTISWOODE, BALLANTYNE AND CO. LTD.
COLCHESTER, LONDON AND ETON, ENGLAND

BR121 .S45
The spirit of Christianity; an essay on
Princeton Theological Seminary–Speer Library
1 1012 00010 7120